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Esmat Abdel-Meguid, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

Syrian call

SYRIAN Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Sharaa has called on Europe to help save the ailing Middle East peace process. During a visit to Madrid this week, Al-Sharaa said Arab states want to freeze ties with Israel and revive the economic boycott in order to draw attention to the harm Israel is doing to the peace process.

European officials were less than enthusiastic about the prospect.

Spanish Foreign Ministry officials, Reuters reported, said Spain and Europe continue to believe that dialogue is the best way to resolve Middle East problems.

Peace options

FORMER Sudanese prime minister and leader of the opposition Umma Party, Sadeq Al-Mahdi, did not rule out secession for the south when he spoke at the American University in Cairo on Tuesday.

In response to a question on the feasibility of secession, Mahdi said that the Sudanese opposition was working for the unity of Sudan but "any alternative is better than war." The conflict in the south would tear Sudan apart if it lasted any longer, he added.

Meanwhile, the National Democratic Alliance, a coalition of opposition groups, announced on Eritrean radio that they have seized the strategic Red Sea town of Aqiq in north-eastern Sudan, and were advancing towards Tokar, south of Port Sudan. Khartoum, however, denied losing Aqiq.

Firing squad

A YEMENI appeals court yesterday upheld a death sentence passed on Monday against Mohamed Ahmed Misleh, who was convicted of shooting dead an Egyptian headmistress, a teacher and four students in two schools he had attacked the previous day. Eleven other children were wounded.

The appeals court ruled that Misleh should be executed by a firing squad on the street where the two schools are located and crucified for three days as a deterrent to others. The ruling will now go to the supreme court and President Ali Abdullah Saleh for ratification, which is expected to be swift.

The shocking crime sparked calls by Yemeni newspapers for a government campaign to rid the country of unlicensed guns, an arsenal estimated by officials at around 50 million weapons.

Sites agenda

THE PROTECTION of underwater archaeological sites from the threats of looting, sewage and dumped concrete blocks — caused by lack of communication between various authorities — is one of the main issues to be tackled at the International Workshop on Submarine Archaeology & Coastal Management in Alexandria next week, reports **Hala Halim**.

Co-sponsored by Alexandria University and UNESCO with the input of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), the workshop will take place on 7-11 April.

The organisers have an ambitious agenda of recommendations.

According to Hassan El-Banna, professor of oceanography and one of the prime movers behind the event, it is hoped that, "the underwater archaeological sites of Alexandria will be declared a national protectorate and registered by UNESCO as part of Human Cultural Heritage" and that the ministers of tourism and culture as well as the governors of Alexandria will develop the sites "as a park with an adjoining museum".

photos: Aref Saadeddin





IMAGES OF ANGER: On Monday, Egyptian cartoonists gathered outside the Arab League, where the meeting of Arab foreign ministers was calling for a halt to the normalisation process, to express their opposition in their own way. The cartoonists have been a thorn in Netanyahu's side, driving him to complain that they are fomenting anti-Israeli sentiment in Egypt. But, with student demonstrations entering their third week, it would seem that public awareness of Israeli brutality is already high. (see p.3)

Zero tolerance

As Arafat cracked down on Islamist militants, an Israeli bus was bombed in the West Bank and Netanyahu made plans for a trip to the White House

A day after President Bill Clinton urged Yasser Arafat to show "zero tolerance" for terrorism, the Palestinian leader yesterday detained 30 Islamic militants in connection with two bungled suicide bombings outside Jewish settlements.

Most of the detainees were followers of the Islamic Jihad group, and Palestinian officials said 13 were released after questioning.

Despite the crackdown, an Israeli bus was hit by a firebomb in the West Bank and overturned near the Palestinian refugee camp of Jelazoun. Radio reports said 12 soldiers and the driver were hurt.

The bus tumbled down a slope and was still burning nearly an hour after being hit, Israel radio said. The report said the driver broke a leg and most of the passengers were slightly hurt.

A Jewish settler leader, Aharon Dombe, said three of the passengers were seriously injured.

The radio report, quoting witnesses, said the bus was hit either by a firebomb or an explosive just before it overturned.

The incident came at a time of growing crisis in relations between Israel and the Palestinians over Israel's decision to start construction last month of a Jewish neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.

The construction triggered daily stone-throwing protests in the West Bank. On 21 March, an Islamist militant blew himself up at a Tel Aviv café, killing himself and three Israeli women.

On Tuesday, two Palestinians blew themselves up in bungled bombing attempts outside Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. Later in the day, Israeli troops shot and killed two Palestinians.

Clinton stepped up his involvement in trying to end the crisis in the peace process — perhaps the worst since Israel's hardline prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, took office last year.

The US president asked Netanyahu to meet with him at the White House on Monday, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called Arafat twice at dawn yesterday.

The Israeli daily *Maariv* reported that Clinton planned to propose to both sides to speed up negotiations on a permanent peace agreement, set a specific deadline and conduct the last, decisive phase in a Camp David-style setting under US auspices.

While the talks go on, Israel would proceed with its three-stage troop pullback in the West Bank, to be completed by mid-1998, *Maariv* said. The United States also proposes to set up a joint Israeli-Palestinian organisation for fighting terror.

As Netanyahu planned reluctantly to head to Washington, officials said he was determined to resist any pressure to halt construction of the Har Homa settlement in East Jerusalem.

The Israeli leader hopes, on the contrary, to use his meeting with Clinton to bring more US pressure to bear on Arafat's self-rule government to halt violent protests and the suicide bombings sparked by the housing project.

"Construction at Har Homa will continue, there is no question of agreeing to any kind of a freeze in exchange for an end to violence and terrorism," said Netanyahu's spokesman, Shai Bazak.

Netanyahu has accused Arafat of inciting the violence to pressure Israel to back down on building in East Jerusalem, where Palestinians want to establish the capital of a future independent state.

"This is the message which will be given to President Clinton: Our policy is very clear, if Palestinian terrorism continues, there will be no peace process," Bazak said.

Although the US used its veto power to block the UN Security Council from adopting a resolution asking Israel to halt construction, the Israeli decision was repeatedly criticised by Clinton on the grounds that it prejudged negotiations on the future of the holy city.

Netanyahu met with his foreign minister, David Levy, on Tuesday to discuss his concern that a visit to Washington at this time risks opening a potentially damaging rift with the Clinton administration. The two men decided that it was impossible to turn down an invitation from Clinton, especially at a time when Israel is facing increasing international isolation.

Ahead of Netanyahu's visit, Albright called Arafat twice yesterday to hear his views on the situation. The Palestinian news agency quoted Arafat as telling Albright: "The Israeli settlement policy... places the entire peace process in real danger." He said later only a halt in settlement building would calm the situation.

Arafat was reported to be ready to begin intensive negotiations on a final peace accord with Israel in exchange for a freeze on settlement activity.

Miguel Moratinos, the European special Middle East envoy, said he relayed the offer Tuesday from Arafat to Netanyahu, who had made the fast-track negotiating proposal before the latest outburst of violence.

"I spoke with Arafat and he said he would agree to speeding up talks on the final status agreement, as Israel is requesting, but other things must also be dealt with," Moratinos told the Israeli daily *Haaretz*.

He said the other issues included a freeze of the Har Homa project and rapid implementation of outstanding elements of the Oslo peace accords, which include authorisation to open an airport and seaport in the Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu said Tuesday's suicide bombings showed that Arafat had sanctioned attacks by Islamic militants. "The attacks are proof that the terror campaign continues," Netanyahu said.

Arafat said Israel's prolonged security closure of Palestinian areas has created a climate of violence. "We are all doing our best... to control the situation."

Netanyahu's visit to the United States was announced by Israel after Clinton sought to allay its security concerns by calling on Arafat to declare "zero tolerance" for terrorism.

Clinton, who met Tuesday with Jordan's King Hussein, made the appeal after conferring with his main Middle East mediator, Dennis Ross, who held talks last week with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

"I don't believe there is an excuse for terrorism in any case," Clinton said. "I believe terrorism is always wrong."

Some confusion remained over the nature of Tuesday's explosions — Palestinian police insisted one was engineered by Israeli troops — but there were growing signs that the militant Islamic Jihad group was involved in both.

The two men killed outside the Netzarim and Kfar Darom settlements in the Gaza Strip had both been held in Palestinian jails in the past on suspicion they belonged to Islamic Jihad.

Green mourning tents were set up yesterday outside the homes of Anwar Shadrawi, a 20-year-old Islamic science student, and Abdallah Madhoun, a 19-year-old high school senior, both from Jebaliya refugee camp north of Gaza City.

A political leader of Islamic Jihad, Sheikh Abdallah Shami, denied the group was involved in the bombings. At a news conference in Gaza City, he accused Israel of having engineered the bombings to further its political goals, but did not give any proof.

Shami said while Islamic Jihad never agreed to cease attacks on Israel, "Jihad determines the appropriate time and place to carry out such acts, and the situation now is not right." (see pp. 3&4)

Amman's uneasy connection

King Hussein is responding positively, if reservedly, to a US request that Jordan help resolve the current deadlock in the peace process. Lamis Andoni, in Washington, looks into the Hussein-Clinton talks

The American administration has urged King Hussein to play a role defusing the potentially explosive crisis between Israel and the Palestinians to pave the way for a US initiative that would salvage the Middle East peace process.

There was no word about any specific ideas that King Hussein and President Bill Clinton might have discussed at their meeting on Tuesday on how to coordinate efforts to put the peace negotiations back on track. But according to well-informed sources in Washington, Clinton told King Hussein that the US needs Jordan's help to prevent the collapse of the process pending the formulation of an American strategy. The sources, who are close to the Jordanian government, said that the king was ready to play a positive role but made it clear that Jordan was opposed in principle to the Israeli plan to build housing units in Jebel Abu Ghneim on the south-eastern edge of Jerusalem.

King Hussein, who was accompanied by the recently appointed Prime Minister Abdul-Salam Al-Majali, is said to be wary of the mounting opposition in Jordan to normalisation of relations with Israel and was not ready to make any move that could imply an endorsement of Israeli government practices. Furthermore, the king is said to be taking seriously the re-emerging consensus in the Muslim and Arab world against developing relations with Washington. "Jordan has no intention of defying the Arab consensus," a member of the Jordanian delegation told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview.

Early this week Jordan suspended talks on the construction of a joint Israeli-Jordanian airport in compliance with an Arab League decision to freeze relations with Israel. At the same time, however, Jordanian officials say that Jordan cannot afford to allow the collapse of the peace process. "We have a vested interest in the peace process. Jordan will continue to talk to both sides," said the official, who requested anonymity.

Sources close to the Washington talks said that the Jordanian delegation felt that the American administration takes very seriously the mounting international, Muslim and Arab opposition to the Israeli settlement activities in East Jerusalem. Consequently, Washington, according to one source, does not expect Jordan to defy the Arab and Muslim consensus but rather to step up its efforts to get the Palestinians and the Israelis to talk to each other.

The sources said that Washington complained to King Hussein that the Palestinians were refusing to initiate any contacts with Israel to discuss the two explosions that took place in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday. Palestinian Security Chief Jibril Rajoub told the *Weekly* in a telephone interview that the US has been pressing through "security channels" that Israeli-Palestinian security coordination be resumed. "Nothing of that sort will happen until the political process is resumed," Rajoub said.

Meanwhile, the State Department has continued to urge the Palestinians and the Israelis to resume contacts. President Clinton announced that he was ready to dispatch Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to the region when the time is right. A trip by special envoy Dennis Ross to the region last week failed to break the deadlock. Palestinian officials in Gaza said that Ross did not present any specific ideas and focused on the need to ensure the continuity of talks and the prevention of violence.

The State Department team in charge of supervising the peace process is currently working on the formulation of a new strategy to get the peace talks back on track. It was not clear what the American administration will have to offer to the Palestinians to calm the raging anger over the Abu Ghneim project. But what is becoming clear is that a Jordanian role will be pivotal to any new American strategy.

Until recently the American administration had focused on ensuring the continuation of talks, and the gradual, albeit slow, integration of Israel into the region. But in the face of increasing Arab opposition to normalisation, Washington is having to reconsider some of its tactics. The challenge, in the view of Arab and American analysts, is to devise a new approach to regain Arab confidence in the peace process.

So far there are no indications that Washington is ready to put pressure on Israel to halt the settlement activities. Consequently, any American initiative will mainly aim at resuming the Israeli-Palestinian talks to defuse the rising tension in the region. Press reports in Washington suggested that the US is ready to consider Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's proposal to bypass the interim talks and go straight to final status negotiations. The Palestinians have already rejected the proposal since it means that the two sides will enter the final phase of negotiations while Israel is still in control of most of the West Bank.

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Stillbirth of a new Middle East

Israel is setting up a free trade zone in the Negev Desert to rival Egypt's planned zone at El-Arish. Galal Nassar investigates




Peres · Rabin · Netanyahu

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres' vision of a "new Middle East" in which Israel and the Arab states engage in mutually beneficial economic cooperation was hollow even before Likud leader, Binyamin Netanyahu, came to power, according to a well-placed Egyptian security source. Advocating a rhetoric of cooperation, Israel in fact consistently sought to undermine the economic development plans of its biggest Arab neighbour, Egypt, the security source said.

In statements made this week to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, the security source cited Israeli plans to build a free trade zone in the Negev Desert as a prominent example of the economic dimension of Israeli policies towards Egypt, the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel, nearly 18 years ago. The source claims that the zone is intended to be in direct competition with an Egyptian free trade zone to be built at El-Arish on the Mediterranean coast in Sinai, and that the Negev site was chosen because of its proximity to El-Arish.

According to the source, the Israeli plan was launched after a Jewish American businessman heard about the projected Egyptian zone from an Egyptian economic delegation that visited the United States in 1995. The American immediately informed the Israeli government, urging it to act speedily and launch its own scheme ahead of Cairo.

However, the idea of an Israeli free zone was already in the works in Israel. During a visit to Israel in late 1995, the American businessman discovered that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, before his assassination in November 1995, had approved the scheme after allegedly learning of the Egyptian plan from an Egyptian source.

The idea — with its declared objective of turning Israel into a "central trade zone for the Middle East" — was pursued by Rabin's successor, Shimon Peres.

The plan for establishing a free zone in the Negev won the approval of the Israeli Knesset in a secret session in March 1996. According to the Israeli *Business* magazine, Israel kept the plan under wraps because, with the strain in Egyptian-Israeli relations, it was felt that to publicise the scheme as a rival for the Egyptian free zone would have been viewed by Cairo as a "hostile" step.

When Binyamin Netanyahu came to power in June 1996, he threw his weight behind the scheme. He met with the American businessman — who was accompanied by a number of Jewish American millionaires — and commissioned him to execute the project, insisting that it should be completed before the Egyptian plan came to fruition. Implementation of the first phase of the Negev free zone project began last December.

The Israeli minister of trade and industry, Natan Sharansky, ordered that the necessary training be provided to the technical and administrative personnel who will run the project, once it is completed by the end of this year. The Israeli government also established a new administrative board to be in charge of all free zones in Israel.

An official in Netanyahu's office confirmed that the free zone will be located at Beersheba, a few kilometres away from the Egyptian border, and will cover an area of 2,500 acres.

According to its blueprint, the free zone is envisaged as a focal point for attracting an inflow of Arab capital, making it a commercial entity capable of dominating the surrounding markets, particularly in the light of the fact that a major segment of Arab trade will have to be routed through the Israeli zone. Thus, Israel will become the major trader apportioning trade quotas to the surrounding states.

Israel apparently aims at emulating the Hong Kong free zone. This would enable it to stage a grand economic entry into the 21st century. Ironically, Israel plans to use Egyptian labour to achieve this aim. According to the blueprint, Israel is planning to build housing quarters for as many as 20,000 workers — Egyptians, Jordanians and possibly Russian immigrants. However, it is thought that the latter will be excluded because they are not used to working in arid desert conditions.

The Association of Jewish American Businessmen has pledged to secure maximum protection from the US administration for the new zone in the face of anticipated Arab criticism, and the Israeli Knesset has already established a committee to follow up the implementation of the project. The sales crew responsible for bringing trade and industry to the zone will comprise Americans and Israelis, and will include the wife of Newt Gingrich, speaker of the House of Representatives, who has vowed to bring 40 multinational companies to the new zone.

NDP versus the NDP

The ruling NDP will be battling itself, and not opposition parties, in next Monday's municipal council elections. Sherif El-Abd reports

Even before balloting was due to begin on Monday, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) had won, unopposed, almost 50 per cent of the 47,382 seats available in the nation's local councils. Mahmoud El-Sherif, minister of local administration, announced on Sunday that candidates for 44.4 per cent of all seats, serving villages, city districts, cities and governorates, have been elected unopposed. Sources said all of them were NDP candidates.

And once the voting begins, many NDP candidates will find themselves battling against fellow members of the ruling party who are running as independents. The latter were not fielded by the ruling party and, consequently, decided to run on their own. But once they are elected, they are very likely to return to the NDP fold.

These two factors assure the NDP will enjoy an overwhelming victory.

A third factor is that the Wafd Party has decided to boycott the elections, while other opposition parties do not have the human and financial resources to contest all seats.

NDP sources claim the party has learned "a lesson" from the 1995 parliamentary elections. In choosing its candidates for the municipal elections, strict criteria were applied, including a good reputation and popularity with the electoral district's inhabitants. The NDP also made it a point to include "fresh blood" and a number of women among its candidates.

As a result, many members were not chosen by the party and had to run as independents.

Many candidates believe that getting elected to a local council is the first step towards gaining a seat in the People's Assembly. And yet Monday's vote is expected to be relatively quiet.

The elections are being conducted for the first time according to the individual candidacy system. A combination of the individual and slate systems, used in the previous election, was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Constitutional Court.

(see p.15)

Presidency gets Web site

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak launched the Egyptian Presidency Web Site on the Internet on Monday at the opening of a two-day conference and exhibition organised by the Internet Society of Egypt.

Mubarak announced the launch in an address delivered on his behalf by Atef Ebeid, minister of the public business sector, describing it as a "momentous step in the modern renaissance that Egypt is now witnessing." Egypt, "the cradle of civilisation, the historic patron of the arts and sciences, is now an active partner in the global information society," he said.

The Web site includes biographical details about the president and Mrs Mubarak, presidential news, an Egypt profile, including history, geography, political system, key economic indicators, and information on investing in Egypt, as well as a tour of Abdin Palace.

"In our continuing efforts to create a competitive, dynamic and more prosperous country, we are embarking on an information technology revolution in Egypt," Mubarak said. "Measures are being taken to improve government performance, empower our business, and prepare our citizens for the information era. Every Egyptian is being encouraged to reach out to the global community."

Over the past 15 years, Egypt has been developing the information and communication technology infrastructure required to support steady and sustainable growth and to improve the quality of life of all Egyptians, Mubarak said. To this end, information centres have been established in ministries and governorates, building up databases on human and natural resources, industry, trade, agriculture and tourism.

"Our new information base has been used to support economic reform and reduce the country's foreign debt. It is currently being used to initiate legislative reform and plan for a better future in education, health, housing and other services for all Egyptians," Mubarak said.

"Approaching the 21st century, Egypt is determined to pursue the path of greater openness to the whole world. One of Egypt's greatest assets is its human resources, whose education and skills are the key for success in the information society. Today, with its wealth of human resources, Egypt's information highway has become a reality.

"More and more Egyptians are entering cyberspace, bridging the barriers of knowledge and contributing to the enhancement of the global network society. We hope that cyberspace, beyond the boundaries of time and place, will make the world a more prosperous and peaceful place."

Hisham El-Sherif, chairman of the Internet Society of Egypt, told the conference that Egypt had joined the Internet in 1993 with objectives in three main areas:

— Globalisation: to provide a window for Egyptians to the world and for the world about Egypt.

— Competitiveness: to empower Egyptian business to compete in product services and in space and time.

— Re-inventing government: to enable our government to function with increasing efficiency and effectiveness, by using modern and relevant systems, tools and technologies.

"Today, we can see the effect of Internet use in different aspects of life, in universities and schools, in government agencies, in business organisations, and in the home," El-Sherif said.

The private sector entered this market a year ago, El-Sherif continued, and "today we are celebrating the second year of the privatisation of the Internet. Eighteen companies are operating already in Cairo, Alexandria and Sinai."

These information highways will be expanded to reach not only the urban areas but also Upper Egypt and the Delta governorates, he said.

Beast on the loose

POLICE patrol cars searched the areas of Qattamiya and Nasr City on the eastern fringes of Cairo on Tuesday for a wild animal — possibly two — after a large number of children were attacked and injured during the previous 48 hours. Trained marksmen were also sent to the two areas to kill the animal, which was last spotted at noon on Tuesday, in a section of Qattamiya which houses the survivors of the 1992 earthquake.

The animal, which witnesses said resembled a wolf-dog hybrid, first appeared in the area on Sunday evening, attacking children who were outside playing. At least 23 children were injured and taken to hospital.

An equally mysterious animal, which inhabitants called *sala'wa*, terrorised villages near the southern town of Armant three months ago, mauling a large number of people, mainly children.

Mummies seized

POLICE raided a furniture shop in the southern town of Aswan on Tuesday and seized three coffins containing ancient Egyptian mummies which were buried in an underground passage. The shop is owned by Abdel-Salam Abdel-Rahman, the vice-principal of an Aswan school, who, police said, was planning to sell the unique relics to an antique dealer.

Abdel-Rahman, who was remanded in custody for four days, told police interrogators that he stumbled upon the coffins by accident after the shop's floor caved in. The police raiders found the coffins hidden in a passage, two metres long and two metres wide, three metres underground.

Back to Texas

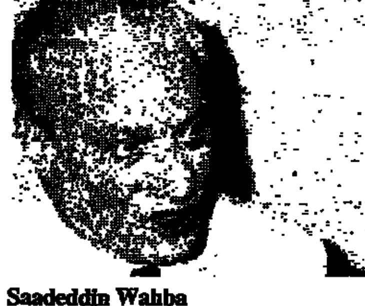
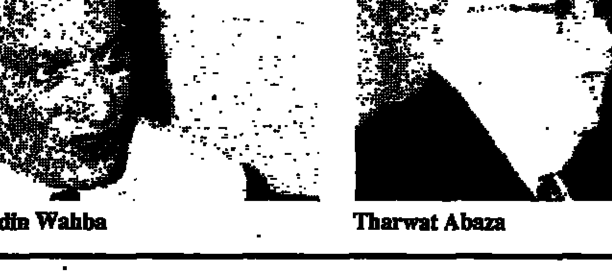
THE PRESIDENT of the American University in Cairo (AUC), Donald McDonald, will relinquish his post once a successor is appointed, but not later than 30 June. "Seven years are enough," McDonald told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. His decision to leave, he said, was not prompted by problems at the AUC. He said he did not wish to renew his contract because, "I feel like retiring and going back to Texas. I will settle myself there first, then decide what I will be doing next."

The AUC board of trustees is expected to establish a committee in the near future that will be responsible for choosing the university's next president.

Frank Vandiver, chairman of the board, issued a written statement declaring, "On behalf of the entire board of trustees of the American University in Cairo, let me say that we accept Dr McDoland's decision to retire with real regret. His successful seven-year presidency has invigorated the university with new faculty and with higher academic attainment, and has given AUC much greater impact in Egypt, the Middle East and the world."

Writers seek a new face

The Writers Union, long met with indifference by most of the country's prominent literary figures, could face some major changes this week. Rania Khallaf reports


Saadeddin Wahba · Tharwat Abaza

For nearly 17 years, novelist Tharwat Abaza has reigned supreme as chairman of the Writers Union, re-elected for successive two-year terms since 1980. But, with growing opposition to his leadership, he faces a tough challenge tomorrow [Friday], when 1,200 union members cast their votes for the chairman's post.

Abaza has just one rival, playwright Saadeddin Wahba, chairman of the Arab Artists Union and secretary-general of the Writers Union. The union's board is also up for re-election. Sixty-nine candidates are competing for the board's 15 seats.

It is said that Wahba now has greater popularity with fellow writers than Abaza, who has come under fire from colleagues for admitting to the union people who are not professional writers, but supporters who will vote for him in the elections. "I really don't understand how people like Ahmed Omar Hashem, president of Al-Azhar University, or Amin Bassiouni, former chairman of the Radio and Television Union can be members of the union," commented Gamal El-Ghitani, a novelist who is contesting one of the board's seats.

"I will definitely vote for Wahba. It is high time that Abaza went," said Farida El-Naqqash, a literary critic.

El-Ghitani described Abaza's frequent re-elections as "shameful". It would be better for him to leave and give members the opportunity to correct the deteriorating situation in the union, he said.

But despite this criticism, Abaza was confident of victory. "I am sure I will win because these accusations are unfounded, whereas my achievements are more concrete," Abaza told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. These achievements, he said, included raising the monthly pension of retired writers to LE50 and increasing the union's budget from LE2,045 at the time of its foundation in 1976, to more than LE1 million now. "I ask all members to tell me what more I could do for them," he said.

Most candidates appear to be in agreement that the union should re-assert itself, particularly in defending freedom of expression and the rights of writers.

Several renowned literary figures are contesting elections for the union's board for the first time. They include Edwar El-Kharrat, Salah Fadl, Baha Taher and Sabri Moussa. "What encouraged me to stand was my desire to work collectively with other groups to bring about some sort of change in the cultural climate," El-Ghitani said. He hopes to give the Writers Union a more active role, increase the monthly pension, and publish a literary magazine.

El-Naqqash, a member of the leftist Tagammu Party, attributed the writers' indifference towards the union to Abaza's supporters' dominance of the organisation. She said writers had lost confidence in the union because of its unquestioning loyalty to the government and failure to take action against "attacks" on freedom of expression. The union's failure to defend Dr Nasr Hamed Abu-Zeid, who was taken to court by Islamist lawyers and ordered divorced from his wife on the grounds of apostasy, was a case in point. "This is why we are not going to vote for Abaza," she said.

However, Abaza insisted that the union did take positions on important national issues. "For instance, we condemned normalisation policies with Israel and rejected Law 93 (which imposed restrictions on the freedom of the press), although I personally was in favour of this law," he said.

Salah Fadl, a professor of Arabic literature and a literary critic, said that intellectuals had shown little interest in previous union elections because of the union's marginal role in cultural life. Intellectuals, Fadl continued, had instead formed their own cultural societies outside the union, from which they had taken courageous positions on freedom of expression and issues of Arab nationalism, particularly after the Egyptian union was penalised for the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty by expulsion from the Arab Writers Union.

Wahba agreed that the role of the union is "weak and getting weaker." But he blamed this on members "who are not keen to take part in the elections and choose their leader."

Fadl, however, believes the union has shown more strength recently, condemning writers who have dealings with Israel. "So, we hope to seize this opportunity to radically change the current leadership, which does not represent the real stance of the majority of writers," he said.

The first priority of the new leadership would be to restore the "Arab dimension" to the union, and shift the headquarters of the Arab Writers Union back to Cairo, Fadl said. He also underlined the importance of setting up a committee to defend the rights of writers, establishing a library and a social club and opening union branches in Alexandria and other big cities.

He added that while the union is classified as a syndicate by its own law, it does not act as one, thus denying its members several advantages. This law, he added, empowers the minister of culture to veto the decisions taken by the union's General Assembly and dissolve the board. "It is necessary to modify this law which threatens the union's independence," he said.

For El-Naqqash, the union's primary goal for the near future should be the establishment of a fund to help young writers.

Brotherhood leader would tax Copts

Two years after the government's crackdown on the illegal Muslim Brotherhood, the group's leader Mustafa Mashhour is sticking to his guns — Islam is the solution. He spoke to Khaled Dawoud

Mustafa Mashhour, the 74-year-old supreme guide of the illegal Muslim Brotherhood, maintains that his group was still willing to conduct a dialogue with members of the government, but that "they are the ones who always turn down the offer."

In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Mashhour's tone was conciliatory. He insisted that the Brotherhood had done its best to avoid a confrontation with the government, despite the arrest of many of its prominent members in January 1995. Accordingly, he said, the group has decided not to officially nominate candidates for the coming local council elections, scheduled for 7 April.

"We are not much concerned with the local elections because they are not as important as parliamentary elections," Mashhour said. "Running for local elections, in which thousands of seats are contested, would require a tremendous amount of energy and money, which we cannot afford at this stage."

Mashhour alleged that past election experience and current dealings with the security forces have also discouraged Brotherhood participation.

"Following the experience of the 1995 parliamentary elections, and all the violence and rigging that took place, we did not want to have another confrontation with the government. As a matter of fact, we have received clear messages from top security officials that even if we did run in the local elections, we would not win," he claimed.

However, the group's leaders have not banned members from running as independents, and the reality is that many Muslim Brothers are contesting the local council elections, particularly in the Nile Delta governorate of Daqahliya. A Brotherhood-affiliated committee in Daqahliya, calling itself the Coordination Committee of Professional Syndicates, issued several statements this week, alleging that police have been putting pressure on their candidates to withdraw from the elections. A spokesman for the group conceded in an interview with the *Weekly* that the main reason behind this alleged pressure was that the candidates belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood.

"The government wants to send us a clear message: 'We are not happy with your activities and we will not allow you to win any elections,'" Mashhour said. "The government knows that if we were to run in any elections, we would win, and that is why we are being suppressed."

Mashhour affirmed that the Brotherhood remained committed to its interpretation of Islamic *shari'a*. Asked whether this meant that the Brotherhood favoured the imposition of *jizya*, or a tax, on the country's Coptic Christians, Mashhour replied: "Yes, this is part of *shari'a*." He also conceded that the application of *shari'a* would entail the exclusion of Christians from the armed forces because they belonged to a faith other than Islam.

"When we have an Islamic state, the army will be the cornerstone of its defence. The soldiers in this army should belong to the same faith, so they will be sure to take the right stand against anyone trying to attack this Islamic state," Mashhour said. "If we have non-Muslims in the army, and a Christian country attacks us, then Christian members of the armed forces could change their allegiance and become agents for the enemy."

When it was pointed out that this highly controversial viewpoint was bound to anger both Christians and others, not only because it deprived Christians of equal citizenship rights as stipulated by the constitution, but also because it treats them as potential traitors, Mashhour was intractable: "*Jizya* is a tax which Christians pay to be defended by Muslims instead of defending themselves. We would not prevent Copts from running in parliamentary elections, for example, but top positions in the army must be occupied by Muslims, because we are a Muslim country defending and protecting Islam."

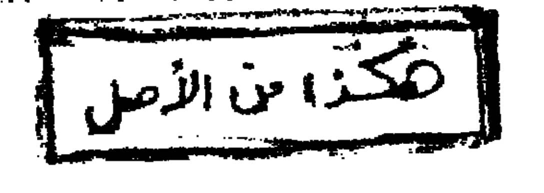
Mashhour denied that the Brotherhood had suffered a major split following a decision by a group of younger members to try to establish a political party, called Al-Wasat, or the Centre Party. He said that the Brotherhood's leadership had initially endorsed their attempt, but when the Political Parties Committee turned down their application for a licence as an official party, the Brotherhood leaders asked the would-be Wasat founders not to go any further and appeal the decision before the Political Parties Tribunal.

"But they didn't listen to us and later submitted their resignations. Only four or five members were involved, so it can't be considered as the major split or rebellion that has been portrayed. Enemies of the Brotherhood like to exaggerate things," Mashhour said.

But according to Al-Wasat sources, the Brotherhood leadership put tremendous pressure on members who supported the formation of a new party. Out of 50 would-be founders who signed the application for official party status, nearly 45 retracted their signatures, thus weakening the party's appeal when it was being heard by the Political Parties Tribunal.

"We do not reject the principle of establishing a political party," Mashhour said. "We have been considering this option since 1984 when we first ran in the parliamentary elections in alliance with the Wafd Party. We have even prepared a political programme for this party. But at the last minute we decided against submitting an application because we were certain that the government would never allow the Brotherhood to have its own party. We remain committed to this principle because we don't want a confrontation with the government." The political parties law forbids the establishment of religion-based parties.

Asked about the Brotherhood's future plans, Mashhour, who spent 20 years in prison under the late presidents Gamal Abdel-Nasser and Anwar El-Sadat, said: "We will continue to call publicly for Islam through all legal channels, whether syndicates, sports clubs, youth centres, schools, hospitals and mosques. We will get the people to understand that Islam is the solution to their present difficulties. We are trying to get the public on our side, so that when God changes the current situation, which cannot persist forever, Islam will be the alternative. Our policy is a long-term one and we do not need to rush."





photos: Ayman Ibrahim

'Peace is more important'

President Mubarak has warned that the peace process cannot be salvaged unless Israeli construction in Jerusalem is stopped

President Hosni Mubarak has said that Israel's decision to build a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem has brought the Middle East peace process to its lowest point since 1977 — the year the late President Anwar Sadat made his landmark visit to the holy city.

"The situation has become very grave," Mubarak said in an interview published on Tuesday in the Israeli newspaper *Maariv*, adding that he felt sad and bitter.

Mubarak said that he had warned Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to keep away from Jerusalem, which is a very sensitive issue, "and yet Israel opened a wound by deciding to build a settlement at Jabal Abu Ghneim. Now the Arab and Islamic worlds are erupting, and there are major demonstrations staged by Egyptian students in protest."

The Egyptian president also said that he was not sure that the peace process could be salvaged unless Israel stopped construction in East Jerusalem.

Mubarak said he felt sorrow as he watched a televised interview with Netanyahu during which an Israeli caller contacted the programme to say that his group had more than 20 people who were ready to stage suicide operations in defence of Jerusalem.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat "felt despair as a result of what is happening," Mubarak said. He added that he was ready to help try to restore the situation to how it was before the Israeli construction decision, "provided Israel takes positive steps."

Mubarak said he did not wish to interfere in Israel's domestic affairs, such as Netanyahu's problems with his coalition partners, "but if the choice is between weakening the Israeli government and the collapse of the peace process, I say that peace is more important than any government."

Israel, Mubarak said, "has managed to frighten the whole world and pushed us all into a very bad situation. It even managed to get President Clinton involved in using America's veto power twice at the UN Security Council. And yet Israel opposes Clinton now and says 'no' to him."

During Netanyahu's first visit to Cairo last summer, the prime minister promised Mubarak that he would work towards making progress in the peace process. "But he has not kept his word until now," Mubarak said. "Had you [Israelis] honoured your commitments to the Palestinians, they would have cooperated with you, and might even have established a confederation with you. But you are losing the confidence of everybody," he warned.

Israelis, Mubarak went on, should understand how the people of this region think. "But the problem is that Netanyahu has lived for many years in the United States. Had he understood the nature of the people of this region, he would have acted differently," Mubarak said.

Israel's expansion in East Jerusalem will "deprive Arafat, and other leaders, of the ability to do anything, because neither Arafat nor any other leader can stand in the face of the entire Islamic world," Mubarak said.

Asked about Netanyahu's claim that Arafat gave the green light to radicals to stage anti-Israel suicide operations, Mubarak replied: "I don't think so. Arafat never wished that violence would reach that extent. He wants a just peace. Moreover, Hamas does not need a green light from Arafat because there are foreign forces that activate it."

Mubarak said he had warned Netanyahu and Yitzhak Rabin before him, that Jerusalem is a very sensitive and complicated issue, "but that a solution, satisfactory to both sides, could be reached, if a discussion of the issue was delayed until the very end, after the climate had become propitious and after the Palestinians had regained their rights."

Since this is an issue that has a bearing on religious belief, "we will always find people who are ready to sacrifice their lives to defend their beliefs. Accordingly, to approach this issue is like playing with fire. You should find a formula or a means for stopping construction in Abu Ghneim," Mubarak said.

He added: "In all modesty, I can say I have a better understanding of the Arab world than Netanyahu."

Answering a question about the future of Egyptian-Israeli relations, Mubarak said: "We won't sever these relations because I am counting on them to help the other parties and the peace process — unless something big happens."

Arabs vow to halt normalisation

The Arab League, reacting to Netanyahu's expansionist policy in Jerusalem, has urged Arab states to halt normalisation with Israel. Khaled Dawoud reports on the League's resolutions, attends a press conference by its secretary-general, and mingles with cartoonists protesting before its headquarters



A two-day meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo has adopted a recommendation urging Arab states which have not signed peace treaties with Israel to halt the normalisation process and close down offices or missions in Israel. The recommendation, adopted by general consensus on Monday, was the strongest Arab reaction to date to the decision of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to build a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem.

A statement issued by the Arab League said the League's council had "studied the latest developments, the imminent dangers and the obstacles which Israel has placed to destroy the peace process." It affirmed the Arab countries' commitment to saving the peace process and achieving a just and comprehensive settlement in the region.

Accordingly, the statement said, the council recommended the following: "Halting steps towards normalisation with Israel in the framework of the peace process, including the closure of offices and missions, and stopping dealing with Israel until it complies with the Madrid conference terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, and the implementation of agreements, pledges and commitments reached by concerned parties on all tracks during the peace talks."

The council also decided "to put on hold Arab participation in the multilateral talks; and to remain committed to an Arab boycott of the first degree [where direct relations are prohibited], and to activate this boycott of Israel until a just and comprehensive peace is achieved in the region."

The recommendation to halt normalisation measures with Israel only applied to countries which initiated such ties after the opening of the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, the League's Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid said. This does not include Egypt, Jordan, which have signed peace treaties with Israel, and the Palestinians, who have signed the Oslo Accords.

But all Arab countries should boycott the multilateral talks, an offshoot of the Madrid conference, focusing on regional issues such as water, environment and disarmament, said Abdel-Meguid. Syria and Lebanon have boycotted the multilateral talks and repeatedly urged other Arab countries to do the same until a comprehensive peace is achieved.

The Arab League chief said the anti-normalisation recommendation did not require the approval of an emergency Arab summit. Arab foreign ministers were merely putting into effect a resolution adopted by last June's Cairo Arab summit which established a link between the normalisation of relations with Israel and progress in the peace process, he added.

However, implementation of the Arab League's recommendation was the responsibility of individual governments, Abdel-Meguid continued, because it was a matter of sovereignty, and the League "cannot dictate what Arab states should do."

The recommendation appears to be directed at Oman, Qatar, Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania, which have established either low-level diplomatic ties or trade relations with Israel.

"Building settlements can never lead to peace," Abdel-Meguid said. "Netanyahu has miscalculated the Arab, Islamic and Christian reaction."

Oman, one of the strongest supporters of the peace process when the former Labour government was in power, said on Monday that it would consider the Arab League's recommendation "in due time."

Oman's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Yusif bin Alawi told reporters that "Netanyahu has closed the door to normalisation." He added that his country would "most probably" close Israel's trade office in its capital, Muscat, but did not give a date for the closure.

Farouq Kaddoumi, the foreign affairs chief of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, said he was confident that all countries which had exchanged representative offices with Israel would close them within a week.

"Now it is up to the Israeli government to decide whether they want normalisation with the Arabs or not. But if they want normalisation, they should normalise with the Palestinians first," Alawi said.

Alawi surprised observers at the opening of the League's meeting on Sunday when he made an emotional speech in which he said that "the confrontation would continue until the day of judgement," if Israel persisted in its policy of Judaising East Jerusalem. Addressing Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who was present at the opening session, Alawi said that all Arabs "are your soldiers" in the struggle to regain Jerusalem and free it from Israeli occupation.

Arafat made a 45-minute speech in which he accused Israel of "declaring war" against the Palestinians, not only by sending army tanks to besiege Palestinian self-rule areas, but also by maintaining a strict closure policy which was inflicting heavy losses on the Palestinian economy. These daily losses, estimated to range between $7 and 9 million, amount to three times the aid which Palestinians receive from foreign donors.

After the meeting, Syria's Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Sharaa said that, by its decision, the Arab League had made an attempt "to exercise some influence, some pressure, on Israeli public opinion. Many Israelis will now say: 'Look, Netanyahu, what you have done to us.'"

Sharaa reacted angrily to statements by Israeli officials, describing the outcome of the League conference as "foolish."

"It is Netanyahu's foolish and irresponsible policies which led us to this situation," Sharaa responded. "The Arabs have taken a wise and responsible decision to salvage the peace process in response to an irresponsible and stupid Israeli policy."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa dismissed the Israeli reaction as "rhetoric."

"I will not respond to such talk," he said. "Israel would be better off facing the facts and grasping the true dimensions of the situation."

Moussa told reporters that he received a telephone call from US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright shortly after the League passed its recommendation. Albright reportedly expressed dissatisfaction with the Arab decision, arguing that freezing normalisation with Israel amounted to freezing the entire peace process.

But Moussa, like several other Arab ministers, urged the United States to show understanding of the League's decision, pointing out that it was adopted only after Israel violated its commitments to the principles of peace, agreed at the Madrid conference.

"Netanyahu was the one responsible for this tension by deciding to build in East Jerusalem and renouncing his commitments under the agreements with the Palestinians," Abdel-Meguid said. "If this was a test, this is the response."

While the Arab League meeting focused mainly on Jerusalem, it was a regular session with many other items on the agenda. The meeting also issued resolutions on the situation in Somalia, the crisis between Libya and the West, and Iran's occupation of three United Arab Emirates (UAE) islands in the Gulf. The three resolutions, like others issued in the past, confirmed support for the three Arab countries.

At the request of Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Osman Taha, the Arab ministers also adopted a brief resolution confirming their commitment to "maintaining Sudan's unity and territorial integrity." The resolution also pledged Arab support for Sudan against outside aggression, but did not name Eritrea, Ethiopia or Uganda, which Sudan accuses of waging war against it.

Four outstanding plans aimed at reviving joint Arab action following the 1991 Gulf War were postponed once again to the League's next meeting in September. The ministers said they needed to consult with their governments before approving plans for an Arab Code of Honour, an Arab Court of Justice, a mechanism to solve inter-Arab disputes and a Libyan proposal to establish yet another Arab Union.

'Netanyahu must pay'

Does the fact that the Arab League has only recommended a boycott of Israel and not actually ordered its enforcement make any difference?

The most important thing about this recommendation is that it was adopted unanimously. The foreign ministers who were attending [the Arab League meeting] spoke in the name of their countries. They voted for it [the boycott recommendation], they adopted it and they are going to implement it.

It is the right of each country to implement the resolution in the way it wants. We [the Arab League] are not a superpower. We cannot dictate. But the presence of foreign ministers — the highest representatives of their countries — speaks for itself.

You said that the Israeli government "miscalculated" Arab reaction. What did you mean by that?

Mr Netanyahu himself has said that the Arab League will never change its position [i.e. will never take this sort of action]. On what ground does he base his judgement? If he believes that, it means that he is totally ignorant of the Arab countries and people.

Do you consider yourselves now in a state of war [with Israel]?

No, we are not speaking about a state of war. I hope you understand me, and don't twist what we say. I said that we are calling for peace. We are a peace-loving nation. But this doesn't mean that we are weak, or that we are surrendering our dignity.

Do you think Mr Netanyahu believes that Arab countries will not be able to revive the boycott against Israel?

He [Netanyahu] has totally miscalculated Arab reaction. In the past he said he would never meet Arafat or shake his hand. Then, later, he shook Arafat's hands. Why does he say this kind of thing? It means he is a very impulsive person. He is underestimating the Arab countries and the Islamic countries.

What impact do you think your decision will have on Israel?

We want to live in peace, dignity and mutual respect, and things were moving with the previous Israeli government. Netanyahu came and turned things upside down. It is not acceptable. He is acting as if the Arab countries are marginal, but this is a serious, serious miscalculation. That's why I am telling him, as I told him months before: "You are playing with fire, and you will be the first to be burned by this fire".

The effect of our decision rests with the Israeli public. I am sure there are a lot of people in Israel who are very keen for peace, who are tired of war and fighting. Why turn to war when we were moving towards total peace and security? This has to be said to the Likud leader.

If he wants to follow Mr Sharon [Infrastructure Minister Ariel], what can we do? But I am sure there are a lot of people in Israel who love peace and want to co-exist with the Palestinians and live like other human beings live, without dominating another people.

How do you think the Arab League decision will affect economic relations with Israel?

How can we have economic relations when Israel is occupying our territories? Netanyahu was the one who started the whole thing and he will pay for it. He started Jabal Abu Ghneim and then went on to claim that the Arabs were the ones who started the violence and broke the peace process. Whom is he fooling? No one can accept that.

Saying it with cartoons

Cartoonists have joined the mass protests taking place in Egypt against the Likud government's decision to build a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem. Although their protest was the most peaceful, it won the attention of the world press and media.

They did not shout slogans or raise banners but simply hung their drawings on the walls of the downtown headquarters of the Arab League, as Arab foreign ministers met to forge a united Arab response to the Israeli move on Monday.

About 200 local and international reporters were also there for the foreign ministers conference and the 25 protesters took the opportunity to talk to them and show them their drawings.

In one drawing, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu was depicted lifting a big stone with the word "settlements" written on it and preparing to smash the "dove of peace" with it.

Several protests have been held by opposition groups and university students since Israel started the construction of the new housing project in Jabal Abu Ghneim in Arab East Jerusalem. Demonstrations were reported to be continuing intermittently at the campuses of major universities. Five Cairo University students were remanded in custody on Monday for planning to organise a protest march to the Israeli Embassy.

Drawings by Egyptian cartoonists have been one source of tension in the already strained Egyptian-Israeli relations. Netanyahu reportedly presented President Hosni Mubarak with a fat dossier including cartoons which Israel considers "anti-Semitic" during their meeting in Cairo last month.

Jewish-American groups also raised the same issue at a meeting with Mubarak during his visit to the United States in mid-March. They asked the president to use his influence to prevent such cartoons from appearing in both government-owned and opposition newspapers. Mubarak responded that the Egyptian press enjoyed complete freedom.

Gomaa, a cartoonist with the weekly *Rose El-Youssef* magazine and a regular contributor to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, said that the Israeli criticism of their drawings was "a medal of honour for all Egyptian cartoonists." Gomaa said he alone had seven cartoons in the file presented to Mubarak.

"They [Israel] cannot accuse us of being anti-Semitic because we [Arabs] are Semites as well," Gomaa said. "We only criticise Israeli Zionists and their suppression of the Palestinian people."

Another drawing hanged on the Arab League walls showed an Israeli soldier, with the Nazi swastika on his helmet, pushing an Arab to the gallows. It is this kind of comparison between Israelis and Nazis which has particularly angered Netanyahu and the Israeli press, informed sources said.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



Israeli soldiers destroy the house of Palestinian suicide bomber Moussa Ghneimat. Ghneimat blew himself up and killed three Israeli women in Tel Aviv two weeks ago (photo: Reuters)

It takes only a spark

Graham Usher, in Jerusalem, examines the situation on the ground in the wake of the Arab foreign ministers' recommendation that all relations with Israel be frozen

One day after the Arab foreign ministers recommended the freezing of all relations with Israel, two bombs exploded near Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli army said the blasts were the work of would-be suicide bombers aimed at buses carrying Jewish schoolchildren. The Palestinian police say one of the bombers was dressed in a Palestinian police uniform and that, if the targets were the settlements, the bombers detonated themselves prematurely. Seven Palestinians were wounded outside the Kfar Darom settlement. No Israelis were wounded.

In a statement released after the explosions, Hamas denied any involvement, charging instead that Israeli intelligence and Palestinian collaborators were trying to foment internal strife on the Palestinian streets. No other Palestinian group has claimed or disclaimed responsibility.

However different in method, the foreign ministers' recommendation and the bombings express an emerging Arab consensus vis-à-vis the Israeli government. The consensus is that should Netanyahu continue to abandon the terms of peace, then Israel will resume the status of a pariah state in the region and face war in the territories it occupies, regardless of Oslo and the fact of a Palestinian Authority (PA). It is a denouement the Likud government appears ready to accept.

The recommendation of the Arab foreign ministers "is a considered move aimed at isolating Israel, applying pressure to cause convulsions and internal fracture and to topple the government," said Israel's foreign minister, David Levy. Netanyahu took the same line. "We will not accept the principle of peace based on coercion," he said.

Addressing the Knesset [Israeli parliament] on 31 March, Netanyahu also vowed not to budge from those decisions that have pitched Arab-Israeli relations to their lowest point since the 1991 Madrid Conference. The Palestinians, he said, "must reduce their expectations and remember to stick within the realm of the possible". They "were convinced a Palestinian state would arise with half of Jerusalem as its capital but now after the further redeployment — and after Har Homa — they understand that this state will not be created," Netanyahu added. This may now be the Palestinians' conviction, especially with an Israeli government led by Netanyahu. However, the idea that the Palestinians, or the Arabs, will passively accept "the realm of the possible" is wholly imaginary.

Since Israeli bulldozers started to build Har Homa on 10 March, the Palestinians have demonstrated continuously. These demonstrations have culminated in mass protests throughout the Occupied Territories on 30 March to commemorate Land Day. If most of these protests have been held in check by co-ordination between Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement and the Palestinian police, in the words of West Bank Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, they "can get out of control."

It is starting to happen. On Land Day, major clashes between Palestinian youths and the Israeli army in Nablus and Gaza were averted only by the swift mobilisation of the Palestinian police, who used live ammunition to disperse protesters in Nablus. So far, about 500 Palestinians have been wounded and three killed, with the latest fatalities being Palestinians shot dead by the Israelis in Nablus and Hebron on 1 April. Suicide operations, both inside Israel and Gaza, have also been revived.

In such circumstances, Arafat will soon be forced to choose between forcibly suppressing the outrage of his own people or, as happened in September, throwing his and the PA's weight behind it. PA sources say that Arafat cannot now, politically, do the former. But armed confrontation between Palestinian and Israeli military forces would mean "war in the territories, not an intifada," according to the Israeli army chief of staff, Amnon Shahak.

For now, Arafat, supported by the Arab foreign ministers, appears to be gambling on either Israeli public opinion or the US or both to not let events get that far. On 31 March, the Labour and Meretz parties filed no-confidence motions in the Knesset. The government survived them with a majority of nine, suggesting that Netanyahu's coalition, for now, is prepared to ride out the storm.

Following US Special Envoy Dennis Ross' lightning meetings with Arafat and Netanyahu last week, there was speculation in the Israeli press that the US was brokering a deal in which Israel would "postpone" construction at Har Homa in return for Arafat accepting Netanyahu's proposal to accelerate Oslo's final status negotiations, including those on Jerusalem and the settlements. However, the US has not yet submitted the reported proposal nor is there any indication that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is about to visit the region.

In the absence of such outside intervention, Israel's condition for a resumption of negotiations is that the PA take action to curb "terrorism and violence" in the self rule areas. The PA's conditions are that Israel must cease all settlement activity "not only at Jabal Abu Ghneim, but throughout the West Bank," says PA Security Head in Gaza, Mohamed Dahlan. The result is an absolute impasse.

In the interregnum, Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are living an utterly explosive reality in which the struggle for Jerusalem has become entangled with the fate of the structures set in place by Oslo. One spark could engulf them and the region at large in flames. In an interview with the Israeli daily *Haaretz* on 31 March, PLO negotiator Hassan Asfour explained that "without a resolution to the crisis, there won't be a situation of no-war and no-peace. The struggle will intensify and at its worst you [Israel] will reoccupy us."

Arab cards must be used

Hours after the Arab League issued a statement recommending the suspension of normalisation with Israel, **Sherine Bahaa** interviewed Palestinian Liberation Organisation Foreign Minister Farouq Kaddoumi

What is your comment on the final communiqué of the Arab League?

No doubt the final communiqué succeeded in reflecting Arab solidarity and the Arab unified stance in the face of the latest developments in the region. It also outlines the future Arab approach in securing the peace process. This came as a clear response to Israel's provocative actions which caused the freezing of the whole peace process and may also result in the total halt of talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Do you perceive the Arab states as holding cards they can use to compel the United States and Israel to respect and implement the agreements already signed and honour the Arabs' rights in Jerusalem?

Yes, Arabs do have a lot of cards to use. The Arab nation has a very strategic position; it links the West and the East. Arab countries have natural resources, especially oil, which the West depends on to operate its factories. It is within this context that whenever the Arab nation unifies its position, it exerts real pressure on the US administration.

One of the main tasks of the United States is to ensure political stability in the region. The Palestinian saga has become a quarrel on the international level as a result of long years of occupation. As a superpower, one of the main US concerns should be peace and stability in the region. This was envisaged in the peace initiative it started in Madrid in 1991 and its role should be to honour its own promises and guarantee the continuation of the peace process. It is in this context that Arabs should stand up to the US as peace in the region is a strategic option.

Do the Arab countries have the will to stand up to the US, or are they satisfied with airing official stances without supporting these stance with necessary action?

Unfortunately, recent wars and conflicts in the region — the Gulf War in particular — have negatively affected Arab power. The split in the Arab front after the second Gulf War weakened their position. However, now, the essence of Arab solidarity has been revitalised and the Arab nations have realised that the US administration is blackmailing them economically and politically, especially the Gulf states.

It is through bitter experience that the Arabs have reached the clear conclusion that the Israeli state is a racist entity that does not want peace. I reiterate that the Arabs have to work hard to protect their interests because Palestine is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It represents Arab security, the Arab future and destiny. Keeping this in mind, one should remember the Arab official armies fighting in Palestine. They were fighting the Zionist imperialist invasion. The aim of the West was to implant Israel amidst the Arab nation to control the region. In short, but for Western aspirations together with the Zionist movement and its hostile aims, we would have lived all together as equal Semite citizens.

Do you feel that the current state of no-war no-peace could be the maximum the peace process brought to the region?

I believe that the ongoing Israeli practices destroy the peace process. Israel did not implement any of the agreed-upon deals, even before the arrival of Netanyahu to power. Rabin himself did not allow in one single refugee although the Oslo Accords stated the importance of the refugees' right of return. A committee was formed including Egypt, Jordan, Israel and Palestine to find a formula for their return, but all to no avail. Israel wants peace and wants the land. It is abundantly clear that Israel wants to swallow the West Bank and does not want peace.

Could differing points of view inside Israel over the issue of Jerusalem cause the downfall of the present government and bring in a new government that might work together with the Palestinians to reach a compromise on this crucial issue?

I am sorry to say that all these ideas are mere illusions in the mind of the Arab citizen. Both Likud and Labour agree on the issue of Jerusalem. The difference in Labour's policy is that it expresses its positions in more acceptable words to deceive world public opinion. Some believed that Rabin was really withdrawing from the Arab lands. On the contrary, if we look at what Israel accomplished in the transitional period, we discover that it did not abide by any of the terms of the agreements.

Israel was supposed to withdraw from the Gaza Strip but it withdrew from only 66 per cent of the lands there. Israel was expected to withdraw from Jericho but it only withdrew from 56 square kilometres out of a total area of 364 square kilometres. No refugees were allowed to return, and Israel still decides solely on 37 issues like water, electricity and airports. This is fraud. I have said it a thousand times since the inception of Oslo. The US administration said bluntly that it has nothing to do with this agreement. Rabin used to say that dates are not sacred; this means that the Israelis can withdraw in a century's time.

Israel does not know anything except the policy of intransigence and the US is an unfair sponsor of the talks. Clinton is furious because we have adopted a defensive stance as Arabs, but when the US uses the veto in the UN they consider it their legitimate right. Arabs have to recognise their interests and priorities and achieve them through solidarity. The Gulf countries, in particular, are being blackmailed by the West economically and politically. They have to understand that [Arab] national security is an indivisible entity. Iraq, the eastern gate of the Middle East, must return to the fold. I do not think that many countries would disagree with this point of view. One must remember Nasser's words: "What has been taken by force will not be returned except by force."

Did Dennis Ross present any suggestions or guarantees to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat before the meeting of the Jerusalem committee in Rabat?

Ross is an American Zionist and a biased person who came to exert pressure, and all his suggestions were completely rejected. Nonetheless, the speech of King Hassan II of Morocco expressed his great sorrow at the Israeli practices. The king used to call for Arab-Israeli rapprochement but Israel thwarted the attempt.

Would you accept that Jerusalem be the capital of two states?

This is possible, but Israel will not allow this to happen.

FIS boycott

THE OUTLAWED Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which was poised to win power in 1992 before the military cancelled elections, will not field any candidates in Algeria's general election due on 5 June, the AFP reported, quoting one of the group's leaders.

"FIS representatives have absolutely no intention to stand in these elections and (will not team up) with other parties whether they share our ideology or not," the FIS leader told the daily *Al-Alam Al-Siyassi*.

This statment contradicts recent reports in the Algerian press suggesting FIS candidates might stand on the electoral lists of other parties, particularly those which, like the FIS, signed an "appeal for peace."

The leader of Ennahda movement recently said his party was prepared to include FIS candidates on its lists.

The anonymous FIS leader was quoted as saying: "This declaration is nothing more than a political manoeuvre designed to win greater popularity and credibility for Ennahda by attracting FIS's large following."

Saudi bomber

A SAUDI man, Hani Abdel-Rahim Al-Sayegh, arrested last month in Ottawa, Canada, was accused of helping to carry out a bomb attack on a US base in Saudi Arabia last year.

US officials believe Al-Sayegh, acting with Iranian backing, masterminded the bombing which killed 19 airmen at Khobar near Dhahran.

A US government source said this lends support to the theory that Iran played a major role in the attack.

Canadian intelligence service believes Al-Sayegh, a Shi'ite Muslim who studied religion in Iran, is a member of Saudi Hizbullah, a militant Shi'ite group with alleged links to the pro-Iranian Hizbullah in Lebanon.

If Washington concludes Iran was involved, it may consider a military retaliation against it.

US officials have said that since Al-Sayegh entered Canada from the US, he could be deported to American territory rather than Saudi Arabia. But a Saudi Interior Ministry official said Al-Sayegh should be sent to Saudi Arabia since he is a Saudi and the bombing happened on Saudi territory.

Al-Sayegh, however, wants to be tried in Canada. A spokesman for the London-based Islamic Observation Centre told The Associated Press that Al-Sayegh told him: "I want an open trial in Canada. I do not trust America, because they want to hurt Muslims." He requested refugee status in Canada, claiming he was persecuted in his homeland for religious reasons.

Al-Sayegh denied that he had any relation with the Khobar bombing, claiming that he was in Syria at the time.

The US accusations coincided with news of an Iranian-Saudi rapprochement. During the meetings of the Gulf Cooperation Council, late last month, Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries said they were ready to improve relations with Iran. They said they welcomed a new Iranian policy trend and the assurances given by Tehran in recent weeks.

Before the meeting, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati toured the Gulf and hailed what he called a "new chapter in good neighbourly relations" with Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Crown Prince Abdallah Ibn Abdel-Aziz met with Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani on the sidelines of an Islamic summit in Islamabad.

Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding on air transport and agreed to establish direct flights between the two Gulf countries.

There are also reports that President Rafsanjani will go on a pilgrimage to Mecca this month. If this happens, he will be the first Iranian leader to pay an official visit to Saudi Arabia since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

US snubbed

JORDAN'S Prime Minister Abdel-Salam Al-Majali accused Washington of interfering in Iraq's internal affairs by insisting that UN sanctions should stay in place so long as Saddam Hussein is in power.

"It is interference in Iraq's internal affairs, and I know the Iraqi people. Whenever they hear such things, they cling more and more to their leadership," Al-Majali was quoted by The Associated Press as saying. Al-Majali was referring to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's comment that a change in Iraq's government "could lead to a change in US policy." She said Washington was ready to deal with a "successor regime" in Baghdad, in a tacit encouragement of opposition groups. Arab leaders have long urged countries not to intervene in Iraqi affairs, fearing such intervention can lead to internal turmoil and destabilise the region.

A moment of truth

The situation is favourable, writes **Ibrahim Ghosha**, of Hamas' political bureau, for the rebirth of the Intifada. The Palestinian leadership must seize this moment now, or be consigned to the dustbin of history

For the record, I would like to remind our brothers at the head of the PLO and Fatah that, when we met in Tunis at the end of December 1992, after the expulsion of more than 400 Palestinians to Marj Al-Zohour in south Lebanon, and after they walked out of the negotiations with the enemy in Washington, we told them: "We are here to help you out of the ditch into which you have fallen, and to re-launch the Intifada on the basis of national unity." That day, Abu Mazen replied: "We are not in a ditch — this is no impasse." Later, it became that he was not posturing: the secret negotiations had already begun. At that time, the PLO and Fatah were scaling the heady peaks of optimism.

Now, I believe, they are plumbing the depths of the Oslo pit, which had nothing more to offer than two per cent of the land of Palestine, chopped into isolated islands with no sovereignty whatsoever. Now that they have seen concrete proof of Oslo's meagre harvest, I ask them: Are they willing to form a united front and establish genuine national unity?

The tragedy of Jebel Abu Ghneim may have a silver lining if, within the high walls the Israelis want to build around Jerusalem, sealing it off from its Arab surroundings, the Palestinians can find a gate which will lead them to genuine national reconciliation and enable them to meet the challenge posed by the Zionists: the threat to crush, with one blow, both the Palestinian question and the rights of the Palestinians.

The question is, can genuine reconciliation — not the attempts staged for local and media consumption, with the usual exchange of rhetoric and a final communiqué imposed by force — be achieved? Experience, past and quite recent, shrouds this question in bitterness and anxiety. Will we be able to achieve national reconciliation on the basis of a united stand against the Zionist master plan and its various manifestations? Or will the Oslo party content itself with placating the opposition, hinting about a necessary apology, and gesticulating belligerently over Jewish settlements on Jebel Abu Ghneim, while simultaneously arranging media demonstrations with those Jewish elements alleged to be in favour of "peace now", at which the Israeli flag is raised and in which members of the Israeli military establishment participate? For how long will the leadership of the Palestinian Authority (PA) continue to believe that it has succeeded in containing the different groups within the Palestinian opposition by creating the Arab and Islamic settlement committees, in order to carry on with its secret meetings, agreements and deals with the enemy undisturbed by any opposition?

A genuine national programme that mobilises all Palestinian forces against the settlement policy is the only sound base from which a true national dialogue can be initiated and the only possible means of bridging the gaps between the various Palestinian forces, gaps made wider by the conclusion of the Oslo Accords.

We call upon all the Palestinian forces to follow the Qur'an's injunction to those who seek a way out of an impasse: it exhorts them to arm themselves for that purpose. Clichés about national unity, and Moses needing the help of his brother Aaron, are absurd — not to mention useless — at a time when Moses is working to consolidate the bridges of security cooperation established with the enemy of the Palestinian people, and when information on the *mujahidin* attempting to stop the construction work on Jebel Abu Ghneim is being collected and sent across around the clock. It is equally inconceivable that the PA should continue to talk about national unity while prisoners from the Palestinian opposition languish in PA jails with criminals and collaborators for cellmates. Finally, it is preposterous that the Palestinian people would take to the streets, as the leadership of the PA keeps threatening, when the PA leaders themselves are holding secret meetings with the Israelis in hotels in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. How can one incite resistance when one is simultaneously in the process of negotiating a settlement?

I tend to believe that attempts to achieve a political settlement have run completely dry, as the Oslo camp's margin for manoeuvre has dwindled to nothing. The only option now is to return to the trenches of the Intifada, to fight a Zionist scheme that is further exposed every day as the exact negation of Palestinian aspirations and rights, or to continue forward, into the abyss, and onward into the dustbin of history. Reports of Arafat leaving for Cairo are incomprehensible: is it not astonishing, to say the least, that a Hercules in Beirut is incapable of finding his courage in Gaza?

The children with stones in their hands, the young people of the Intifada, fought tirelessly for six years, painting the picture of the homeland on the skies of humanity, paving the road for all those who aspire to freedom. There are still enough stones in Palestine, and 30,000 guns in the hands of the Palestinian police.

We believe it is high time that the Intifada, aborted in Oslo, be revived. The domestic situation, marked by an increasing sense of frustration and despair among the Palestinians, thirsty for dignity and revolution, is opportune. The Arab and Islamic situation is also propitious, because the battle for Jebel Abu Ghneim is, in essence, the battle for Jerusalem and Palestine. If the nation does not fight this battle now, it will never be able to fight again, and will grow ever weaker and more enslaved. This is the lesson of history. The international situation is also favourable. All nations but two support the rights of the Palestinians. It is America and the Zionist entity that are isolated — not us. This is how we should understand the equation and take advantage of a favourable international wind, which may not blow again.

The leadership of the PLO and Fatah is faced with a historic opportunity that may not be repeated: the opportunity to return to a correct course and the premises to which it originally adhered. Despite the harm that has befallen Hamas during the past three years, whether at the hands of the Zionists, the Americans or our own kins, we now open our arms and our hearts. We are ready to cooperate with all sincere and honest Palestinians in launching a new Intifada that will not stop until the occupation ends and Palestinian land is purified from the last trace of the invaders.

Long ago, it was said that the brave man dies but once, while the coward dies a thousand deaths. The great Al-Mutanabbi also said: "If death is inevitable, it is dishonourable to die a coward."

But if some, God forbid, insist on placing themselves between our people and the enemy, the results will be catastrophic, and they will stand responsible before God, people and history.

An abridged version of the article in Arabic published in Al-Hayat *of 1 April.*

Sudan's battle for secular power

The National Democratic Alliance stands fast for secularism, says Farouk Abu Eissa in an interview with **Gamal Nkrumah**



SPLA troops stormed the garrison town of Yei on 20 March. Young SPLA soldiers pose after recapturing the town and occupying government buildings (photo: AFP)

What is extraordinary in the Sudanese conflict is *that all opposition groups, including the quasi-*religious ones, are embracing secular and liberal policies wholeheartedly. The forces of secularism *are taking on the forces of Islamism.*

Sudan stands poised for a new chapter in its history. A new Sudanese constitution is to be signed at the next *National Democratic Alliance (NDA)* council meeting. In recent brainstorming sessions in Cairo and the Eritrean capital Asmara, where the *NDA is headquartered,* leading Sudanese opposition figures have tackled the problem of defining a post-Islamist Sudan. The issue is not only one of *defining a new Sudan,* but of guaranteeing that the various Sudanese opposition forces will remain united until they implement sweeping political *changes in Sudan.*

Farouk Abu Eissa, secretary-general of the Arab Lawyers Union, was in fighting form when I interviewed him. Key NDA leaders met in Cairo this week to attend an NDA committee meeting chaired by him. The committee included Salah Farah, a distinguished *Abu Dhabi*-based Sudanese lawyer, the Sudan People's Liberation Army's (SPLA) Mansour Khalid, Farouk Ahmed Adam, Amin Mekki Medani and *Peter* Niot *Kok,* the *SPLA*'s secretary of justice.

The NDA met to define its objectives and set target dates for instituting radical change in Sudan. "We met for seven days, but no mention was made of Islam, even though the policies of the Islamist regime have criminalised non-Muslims in Sudan. Some delegates interrupted the proceedings to pray. But we insisted on the complete separation of religion and politics in Sudan. We intend to criminalise those who want to mix Islam with politics. Religion is a private matter. Politics is a matter of public concern," Abu Eissa told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

"We cherish Islam and other religious traditions that deeply *affect our culture and society. Islam is* an essential component of our cultural heritage. Islam is the guiding principle of our moral codes and value systems. It governs the behaviour of the majority of people in Sudan. But we recognise the multiplicity of cultural, ethnic, racial and religious strands in Sudan," *Abu Eissa* explained. "We insist that our new constitution guarantees the rights of all Sudanese people regardless of race, ethnic origin and creed. We want our new constitution to conform to the international standards of human rights charters. Mixing religion and politics must be made unconstitutional," he said.

According to Abu Eissa, the vast majority of Sudanese people have rejected an Islamist agenda that they see as ineffectual. However, money is still needed to improve the opposition's effectiveness. Mohamed Othman Al-Mirghani, the Democratic Unionist Party chairman and NDA president, chaired a meeting in the Eritrean capital Asmara aimed at improving *NDA broadcasts to listeners in* Sudan. Farouk Abu Eissa told the *Weekly* that the NDA aims at strengthening internal opposition forces. "We are trying to find out exactly what the internal opposition needs in order to oust the NIF [National Islamic Front] regime," he explained.

A fund-raising committee headed by NDA President Al-Mirghani, includes Omar Nour Al-Daim, ex-premier and leader of the Umma Party Sadig Al-Mahdi, Mansour Khalid and Abu Eissa. Topping the list of priorities is raising enough money to cover the expenses of the three-month programme aimed at overthrowing the NIF regime. "So far the money collected has come ex*clusively from Sudanese sources," Abu Eissa told* the *Weekly*.

"We now have our own activists, whom we cannot *name for obvious reasons, inside Sudan. I* can tell you, though, that they are trade unionists, professionals, army officers and retired military men. They spearhead internal opposition to the regime. In conjunction with us, they coordinate activities between the exiled opposition forces and the internal opposition. We have regular contact with them. Our priority at the moment is to support the popular uprising, the *intifada*, inside Sudan. We have, therefore, established a high-powered committee composed of leading opposition figures. We have also set up support systems for this committee," Abu Eissa said.

"If [Sudanese President] Omar Hassan Al-Bashir *wants to mend fences with us — the external op*position — then he has to mend fences first with the internal opposition forces. Bashir must stop terrorising *the Sudanese people. He must* free the thousands of political prisoners whom he has imprisoned in the past few months. We appeal to Bashir to stop gathering the unemployed youth, the school dropouts, the street children in order to push them into the furnace of a war they neither understand nor need," Abu Eissa told the *Weekly*.

"When Bashir talks about three strands, the regime, the northern opposition and the southern opposition, he is trying to mislead the world. There is only one opposition, the NDA. Bashir is trying to cause a rift between the northern and southern opposition forces in the NDA," he said.

"We are also working hard on the diplomatic *front. We are targeting Egypt and neighbouring Af*rican countries. Our very special relationship with Egypt could be used as a leverage to remove the *NIF* regime from power. We are acutely aware of Egypt's importance to Sudan. Egyptian-Sudanese relations have been fluctuating like a see-saw. We should put a stop to this oscillation. We should build a more stable Egyptian-Sudanese relationship. We should strengthen the cultural, economic and political ties between the two countries. We share security concerns, the River Nile. Our historical ties go back to ancient times. Arab national security and African national security can only be guaranteed by stronger Egyptian-Sudanese ties. We are drawing up a new charter to govern our relationship with Egypt, the Nile basin countries and the countries of the Horn of Africa. A permanent *policy of good neighbourliness must be enshrined* in our constitution," Abu Eissa explained.

Abu Eissa expanded. "A new national charter for guiding relations with Egypt and the African countries surrounding Sudan should be put firmly in place soon. The acceptance of all Sudanese opposition parties of a new Egyptian-Sudanese charter must be made obligatory. We call especially for the formation of an economic and environmental grouping that links together all the countries of the Red Sea basin but Israel should not be party to such a forum. Such a grouping could be a forum for regional development. We should develop our vast resources collectively," he told the *Weekly*.

"Sadig Al-Mahdi visited Kenya recently and we saw an about-face in Kenya's attitude to the Sudanese crisis. Kenya is now very sympathetic to the Sudanese opposition cause. Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi agreed with Al-Mahdi that the NIF regime is an evil government and a threat to all its neighbours. We have also witnessed a more positive attitude from Libya. Hitherto, Tripoli has been one of the main backers of Khartoum. Today, the situation is changing fast inside Sudan. We realise that Libya has a critically important role to play in the region and we appreciate the more sympathetic tone to our cause from Tripoli," Abu Eissa said.

"Talk about an imminent foreign invasion is misleading. Sudan's neighbours have no interest in invading the country because that would alienate them from the Sudanese people. The government's claims that Ethiopian, Eritrean and Ugandan troops have been fighting alongside NDA forces are designed to mask the real issue: the struggle between the Sudanese people led by the NDA and the ruling NIF-led clique," Abu Eissa said.

In Asmara, "the NDA also discussed plans for the *post-NIF era. A committee has been set up to select* a new leadership for the various judicial and executive positions for the transitional period immedi*ately following the ouster of the NIF regime,"* Abu Eissa said. Sadig Al-Mahdi attended the Asmara meeting. However, "the issue of Halayeb was not discussed. It is of very little importance to us. The NIF regime tries to turn it into a national issue. It is irrelevant," Abu Eissa said. Halayeb is an Egyptian-held area north of the 22nd parallel which is universally recognised as the border between Egypt and Sudan. But Khartoum claims the area, which abuts on the Red Sea.

The Sudanese government is involved in intensive behind-the-scenes moves to get Bashir to visit South Africa in mid or late April. Sudanese opposition forces are also queuing up to visit South Africa and have an audience with South African President Nelson Mandela. Sadig Al-Mahdi is scheduled to go to South Africa soon after Bashir's visit. *Sudanese leaders feel that only a man of Man*dela's calibre can play a conciliatory role between the Sudanese government and the opposition forces. *South African Deputy Foreign Minister* Aziz Pahad is said to have taken it upon himself to look into the Sudanese question.

Nevertheless, reports filtered through the South African press this week that South African-based Sandline International is training the SPLA fighters. Sandline is linked to South African-based Executive Outcomes, a military multinational reportedly capable of supplying up to 1,000 mercenaries and an air-wing that includes MiG-27 ground attack jets. Diplomatic sources told the *Weekly* that Bashir threatened to cancel his visit to South Africa upon learning of Sandline's activities in southern Sudan. However, the SPLA vigorously *denied the reports.*

Africa's place in the global village

Yash Tandon warns about the dangers of globalisation and Africa's options

Globalisation in its broadest sense is part of the movement of history itself. Throughout history people have moved from food-deficit to food-surplus regions taking with them their families and flocks. However, every age has its own characteristics. The most dominant character of the contemporary phase of globalisation is the final conquest of the world by capital. Capital seeks to rule the world by demanding that its movement and operation be unfettered by national barriers. This is what contemporary globalisation is all about. *This movement* started as early as the 17th century, but it reached its fullest expression after 1880s, with the maturation in the West of the *institution of* the joint stock company, of banking, of industrial capital, and of the development of *deep mining technology. This is* when the "scramble for Africa" acquired globalisation's most rapacious character.

This process of globalisation was interrupted by the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union in 1917. Two systems now prevailed in the West, one decidedly opposed to the globalisation of the rule of capital. For slightly over seven decades (1917-1989), the Cold War enabled the peoples of the South to take advantage of this divide in the West to acquire a measure of independence for themselves. Some countries in South East Asia were able to copy Western technology and sell their products in the US market. No such luck awaited Africa, however. Not until 1975 were the last remnants of direct Portuguese colonialism dislodged, and not until 1994 was apartheid removed from South Africa. At the economic level, Africa remains tied to a system of global division of labour in which it performs the function of mainly supplying raw materials to the West. Hence the dominance of extractive industries and the associated banking, transport and other service sectors in Africa.

The end of the Cold War has ended the period when Western technology could be copied with impunity. The West, especially the USA, is tightening its control over intellectual property, which has become a dominant aspect of both industrial production and in international trade. This is reflected in the new trade regime in*augurated by the Uruguay Round Agree*ment (URA). Under the new WTO regime, tariff walls must now face the fate of the Berlin Wall. They must fall. Furthermore WTO, unlike its predecessor, has "teeth". Countries that violate patent laws and tariff agreements must now be hauled before a panel of judges, pronounced guilty, and punished by a cross-sectoral sanctions mechanism, a situation that allows the strong to extract what they will and the weak to surrender what they cannot protect (see below for an example of this).

The new language of international discourse in the battle for markets is couched in trading terms. Everything these days is "trade-related", a prefix the Western nations use in order to bring within the jurisdiction of the WTO such issues as intellectual property and investment measures. The old General Agreement for Trade and Tariffs (GATT) used to deal with goods that could be seen crossing the borders. Now, under the WTO, if Egypt or Zimbabwe violates some agreement related to the free flow or operation of capital, or if some local company copies a Western copyrighted technology, these matters also fall under the new "trade" regime. In fact, "trade" is a misnomer; it is really about the free movement of capital.

Also, during the old GATT days, nobody inquired about how goods were produced, bananas were just bananas. These days "bananas are not bananas" unless they meet certain standards in the production process. The West is increasingly putting pressure to subject the "processing" part of production to the same rules of trading as the products themselves. Hence if bananas are produced under *conditions damaging to the environ*ment, or carpets, using child labour, those bananas and carpets would not be trade-legitimate. The US, for example, has imposed import restrictions against wild-harvested shrimps from Malaysia and Thailand on environmental grounds of conserving sea-turtles. In January 1997, the two countries requested the WTO to set up panel to look into it, but the US has so far blocked the process on the grounds that this is part of US domestic law.

The spirit of new globalisation is strongly mercantilist. Now nothing is for nothing. This is now the era of hard economics, much like the era of mercantilism at the dawn of capitalism. In the United States, the mercantilist tendency reached its peak with the commerce secretary, the late Ron Brown. Besides leading high-profile trade missions abroad, Brown had organised a 'war room' in the Commerce Department to track the 100-odd biggest contracts overseas and plan government support for American companies (See *The Economist*, London, 1 February 1997, p.24). Governments, especially those in the West, are now openly becoming salesmen on behalf of their corporations.

What does this mean for Africa? Let us just take one sector alone — food production. Historically, land was converted from food to producing industrial raw materials for Western industry. The demands of Lancashire textile mills for cotton, for example, weighed heavier than the needs of the local population for food. During the colonial period, these external demands were given priority through co*lonial laws and forced labour. After in*dependence it is the market that does the same job. In the market place, a Dutch consumer, for example, can command the use of African land more forcefully than a poor African consumer. Why? Because the Dutchman can pay a higher price for a bunch of roses than a poor African can for a kilo of maize. World Bank officials are already advising African governments to go for "high-value" export crops because this will earn them foreign exchange. How land is used in Africa is thus conditioned not by Africa's food needs but by the demands of an over-consuming population in the developed world and of a small elite within Africa. Thus land conversion has continued after independence into new products from horticulture to ostrich farming and golf courses and eco-tourist projects. Today Africa has become a food-importing continent. One of the effects of Uruguay will be to increase food prices, and Africa will have to pay more to feed its population.

An even more serious threat posed by the present phase of globalisation lies in the aggressive character of international capital. Land use is already influenced by the consumption habits of the North. But now, there is the additional threat of land ownership falling into the hands of foreign capital. The WTO ministerial meeting in Singapore has laid the first steps for capital to demand "national treatment" and its free mobility unhindered by national barriers, conditions already imposed on NAFTA countries by the United States. Africa will, of course, fight to retain con*trol over its lands, but it may lose some* crucial battles over it. This is particularly so because of two factors that have ren*dered Africa vulnerable. One is the weak*ening of the African state in relation to external forces, and the second is the almost religion-like faith African governments have in foreign direct investments (FDIs). The danger is that Africa thus is losing even further, whatever little control it has over land and local resources.

So the inevitable question: What is the way out for Africa, for the Third World generally? What are the alternatives? First, more needs to be done to expose the dangers that lie in the new phase of globalisation. Secondly, they need to work out concrete strategies to counter these.

Options for the South are clear: adaptation and/or resistance. Weaker countries in the South will tend to adapt to the new situation, or simply surrender, as many countries in Africa appear to be doing. Those of them who feel strong enough to resist the force of globalisation must do so at all levels — local, national, regional and global. At the WTO meeting in Singapore in December 1996, both weak and strong countries of the South grouped together to fight against "the new issues" that the West had brought on the agenda of the WTO (such as labour standards, information technology, and investment measures). The South won some battles (on the issue, up to a point, of labour standards), but lost on issues related to the standardisation of investment measures and, significantly, on the information technology issue.

At the end of the day, the battle against globalisation will not be won by Third World governments, weak as they are *against the forces of imperialism, but by* the masses of people taking to the streets, or seizing lands as they have done in the rural areas of *South Africa* and *in the Chiapas* province of Mexico. People will not forever sit and watch their precious lands be converted into ostrich farms and golf courses. If governments fail to carry out a wholesale agrarian reform that liberates nationals from foreign control and women from patriarchal control, it would be for peoples' movements to resist globalisation and to consolidate their hard-won political independence.

The writer is a member of the International South Group Network (ISGN)

Asia's equity trap

Is East Asia heading for an equity trap, asks **Bharat Jhunjhunwala**

The *Asian Development* Bank (ADB) has asserted that the deteriorating external payment situation among the Asian Tigers "need cause no alarm about an impending Mexico-like crisis." Maybe. Nevertheless, the very fact that such a *statement* had to be made is sufficient proof that such a danger does indeed exist. The fact that these countries continue *to attain unprecedented* high rates of growth at the present does not eliminate such a possibility for, after all, it took 20 years *for the* Mexican *crisis* to manifest itself.

Let us examine what the *Asian Development Outlook* for 1996 and 1997 has to say about the four major economies of the region. The gross domestic savings in *China was 42.2 per cent of* GDP in 1995. This was more than adequate to meet the entire gross domestic investment of 39.5 per cent and budgetary *deficit of 1.2* per cent. Why then the need for the massive foreign investment inflows of $34 billion? And where did that money go *if* domestic savings were available?

The explanation is interesting. ADB says that the true deficit was close to eight per cent of the government spending to loss-making public enterprises. The government was unable to contain the hidden subsidies to these public enterprises and a good share of the domestic savings were used for meeting their losses. This led to a shortfall in the availability of savings for domestic investment, which, in turn, was met by foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows. In other words, FDI provided the funds for financing the losses of the public enterprises rather than for incremental investments in the economy.

The inflationary pressures in Indonesia are building, at least in part, due to the heavy increases in the wages of government employees which, the ADB says, "could put upward pressure on private sector wages as well." These wage increases are, on the one hand, fuelling a consumption boom and, on the other, eroding the competitiveness of Indonesian exports. Consequently, imports rose by a whopping 40 per cent between 1993 and 1995 while exports rose by only 22 per cent. The outflows on account of profit repatriations, interest and other service charges is also increasing. As a result the Indonesian external current account balance is deteriorating sharply. This external account deficit is being financed by foreign investment. In other words, the FDI is providing the funds for financing an import-driven consumption boom.

Easy availability of commercial credit stimulated private consumption in Malaysia, reports ADB. The rate of growth of private consumption almost doubled to 13.7 per cent in 1995. This, combined with import liberalisation, "resulted in acceleration of import growth to 31 per cent in 1995. With imports expanding faster than exports, the merchandise trade account moved into a deficit for the first time since 1982." This external account imbalance was compounded further by substantial outflows of FDI earnings — $6 billion in 1995 — marginally higher than the *current* FDI *inflows* of $5.9 billion. In other words, current FDI in Malaysia is providing the funds for private *consumption and meeting the* requirements of profit remittances, much like in Indonesia.

In Thailand, there was a substantial increase in domestic demand for consumption goods fuelled by a rise in agricultural incomes and salaries and wages. This consumption boom led to a "decline in household savings." These "rising labour costs are already leading to a loss of competitiveness vis-à-vis labour-rich countries," says ADB. The result has been that imports at $61.9 billion in 1995 were higher than exports at $55.4 billion and rising faster by about four per cent. The external current account deteriorated. FDI inflows also started faltering — down to a measly $640 million in 1994 from a high of $2.4 billion in 1990. Thus, unlike other tigers, Thailand does not seem to even have the option of financing current consumption by current FDI inflows.

This is the story of the four largest economies of East Asia, as narrated by the ADB. It has all the ingredients of the Mexican crisis, namely, a consumption boom, liberalisation of consumer imports, *expanding burden on account of profit re*mittances and a deteriorating external current account balance. This external deficit is being financed, for the present, by FDI inflows. With export performance coming under stress, the alternative of meeting this deficit by improved performance in that sector is not available to these countries. They have only one option: attract yet more FDI to meet their deteriorating external balance.

This is precisely what happened in Mexico: a consumption boom, liberalised consumer imports, declining exports and increasing debt-service burden. The party went on as long as bankers were willing to extend further loans to meet the debt-service obligations on earlier loans. But the balloon burst as soon as such credit became inaccessible. The Asian Tigers are facing an almost identical situation. As long as current FDI continues to flow, the crisis will be contained but the bubble will burst as soon as such a flow ebbs.

There are two crucial differences in the Asian case, however. One, the Asian Tigers have high rates of domestic savings. This may enable them to service the FDI *profit remittances better than Mexico.* Just as the oil revenues did not suffice to prevent the debt crisis in Mexico, higher savings may not prevent these countries from falling into an 'equity trap'. The second difference is that FDI is allegedly more productive-investment oriented than Mexico which suffered from such problems as capital flight.

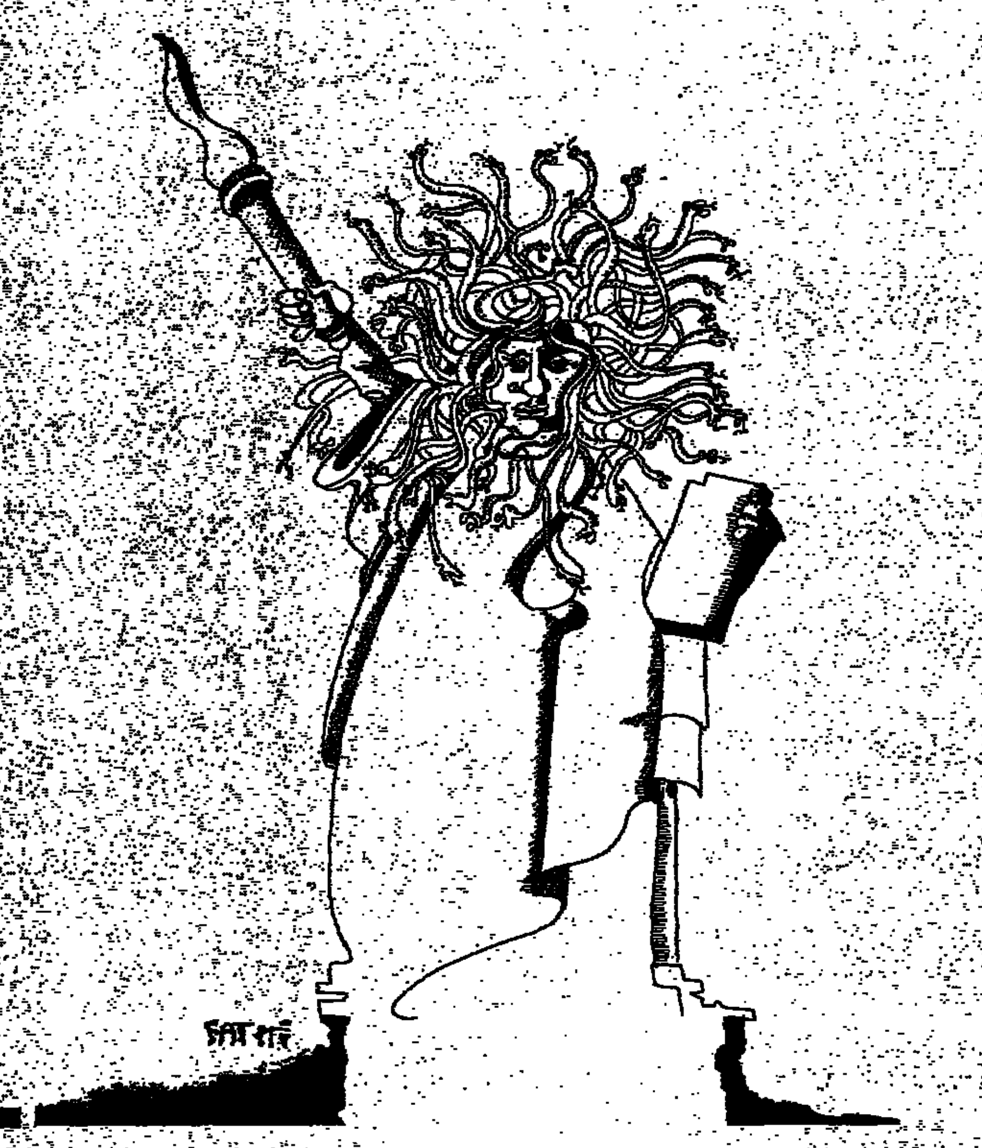
It is unfashionable these days for the ADB to raise doubts about the Tigers who, with consistently high rates of growth in the last decade, have succeeded in bringing down their levels of poverty substantially and are being touted as examples for all the developing world to emulate. One should not forget, however, that a similar hoopla had accompanied the debt-financed growth of Mexico in the seventies. Why, then, is the nineties being called the 'lost decade'? The problem is that the long term ill-effects of any foreign-financed consumption take time to appear. It took two decades for the bubble to burst in Mexico. Let the other developing countries, therefore, not blindly emulate the Asian Tigers but seek growth by promoting the better utilisation of their own savings and curbing consumption rather than encouraging it.

The author is a Delhi-based columnist

Al-Ahram Weekly

A little more of the same





The polls indicated voter apathy, little concern for foreign policy and a marked preference for the status quo. So what should the Arabs expect from the world's sole superpower during Clinton's second term, wonders Hassan Nafaa, and how can a pro-Zionist administration be persuaded to put pressure on Israel?

The foreign policy of an international power with the status of the US is not the result of a particular moment in history, regardless of its significance, nor the brainstorm of a single man, no matter how influential or charismatic. Nor may it be summed up in a particular party platform or ideological current, regardless of how long that party has remained in power or how deeply that ideology is rooted in American intellectual and social culture. Consequently, a study of this sort must be based on a precise understanding of all the factors that determine continuity or change in American foreign policy.

Political science literature repeatedly stresses that domestic, not foreign, policy issues direct decisions at the ballot box, whether voters are choosing the chief executive or their congressional representatives. This applies to all political systems which hold free and democratic elections. The same literature, however, indicates that there are fundamental differences in this respect, from one country to the next and between one political system and another. With regard to the American political system, the influence of foreign policy issues on major electoral battles, especially the presidential elections, is affected by two essential factors.

First, the emergence of the US as an international power, relatively distant from the locus of international events, has engendered in a large segment of the American public a sense of superiority and self-sufficiency. US interests became intricately intertwined with the international order as a result of successive technological and political developments, and this has given rise to a certain duality toward the outside world. On one hand, the country is drawn toward latent isolationism; on the other, it is drawn irresistibly to intervene in international affairs in the defence of American interests and to exploit America's relative superiority in order to exert its hegemony.

The consequent vacillations between isolationism and interventionism inevitably affect American collective consciousness and are a decisive factor in some presidential elections. The most notorious example of this duality was the fall of Woodrow Wilson, who advocated a more active international role for the US through the League of Nations.

Secondly, America is a society of immigrants and minorities. Its political and juristic existence as an independent nation is little over two centuries old, and the relationship with many of its ethnic communities and indigenous inhabitants is subject to continual renovation. Some communities have formed powerful lobbies, compelling the candidates to take certain stances on particular issues related to foreign policy. The Irish Catholics, to cite one example, are a group whose votes are generally determined by the candidate's stance on Northern Ireland. The most prominent group, however, is the highly organised and extremely effective Jewish lobby, whose stance at the ballot box is generally determined by the support the presidential candidate demonstrates towards Israel.

But this does not mean that foreign policy must prevail over domestic issues in determining the results of the elections. Only under exceptional circumstances do foreign policy issues top the American voter's immediate agenda of issues pertaining directly to social, economic and personal security. Stephen Hess has outlined six instances in which foreign policy issues can permeate the presidential electoral campaigns in America.

Prime among these is an international crisis during the electoral campaign itself, particularly during the critical three months leading up to election day. The crisis must have a direct impact on America's global standing and influence. The clearest example of such a crisis occurred during the 1956 campaign between Republican candidate Dwight Eisenhower and Democrat Adlai Stevenson. At the height of the campaign, two international crises erupted: the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the tripartite invasion of Egypt. These crises, both of which erupted in October, had a profound effect on the course of the presidential campaign.

A crisis can remind the American voter that the candidate for president is also potentially the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and that certain issues require the public to "put aside their differences and rally round the flag."

Secondly, foreign policy issues can spring to the forefront in electoral campaigns when they become a domestic issue because of their direct effect upon American lives and well-being. The Korean War, which dragged on for three years with no clear aim, the war in Vietnam, and the American hostage crisis in Iran were crucial in determining the results of the presidential elections held during those periods.

During the 1996 elections, the presence of the American forces in Bosnia could have triggered similar results had their experience been similar to the debacle in Somalia or in Bosnia prior to the Dayton Accord.

The third type of foreign policy issue that can obtain the acute attention of the American voter is when one of the candidates commits an error which casts grave doubts upon his capacity to conduct American foreign policy. Such an incident occurred during the 1964 elections, when the Republican candidate, Barry Goldwater, announced that he was prepared to use nuclear arms in Vietnam, giving his opponent the opportunity to dub him "the nuclear bomber." Ford, the Republican candidate in 1976, committed a similar *faux pas* during the televised debate with Jimmy Carter, the Democratic nominee, when his remarks on Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe were inconsistent with the American voter's stereotypical image of this issue. The contestants in the 1996 campaign committed no such slips.

There are also cases where a candidate seeks to turn a foreign policy issue to electoral advantage. In the 1996 elections, for example, Dole's declaration of his desire to move the US Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem was primarily intended to win over the Jewish vote.

Not infrequently, a candidate will raise foreign policy issues during the electoral campaign in order to demonstrate expertise in foreign affairs. The examples of this are legion, but perhaps Bush stands out in particular for having played upon his previous experience as a US representative to the UN, a former ambassador to China and former chief of the CIA. His ability to impress upon the American public his competence in conducting foreign policy was instrumental to his victory in 1988.

The sixth and final point that Hess lists is when the candidates want to stress the difference between the political parties over certain issues. In 1996, for example, Senator Dole defended the Republican party's commitment to "halting the decline in defence allocations." This stance put President Clinton on the defensive, forcing him to defend his party's refusal to increase defence expenditures while emphasising that would not put national security at risk.

The list Hess provided does not comprise all the instances in which foreign policy issues can crucially influence the outcome of American presidential elections. What is certain is that there is no permanent or fixed base of criteria. That a candidate might prove entirely successful in the conduct of foreign policy matters is not necessarily sufficient to turn the elections to his favour. Nothing could demonstrate this more absolutely than George Bush's defeat against Clinton in 1992 in spite of the fact that Bush's popularity in the wake of the Gulf War had exceeded 90 per cent in the opinion polls, an unprecedented record in the history of American electioneering. Indeed, such an overwhelming success in foreign policy can prove detrimental under certain conditions, particularly if elections are being held in the midst of an economic crisis. In such an event, the candidate exposes himself to the accusation that he is neglecting the ordinary citizen in order to win personal laurels. This is precisely what happened to Bush following the Gulf War.

It is true that certain groups are inclined to single-issue voting, but these are limited in their influence and ultimately vote in different directions that tend to balance out in the end. Still, the general pattern is for voters to base their decisions on a complex set of factors which can vary considerably from one election to the next. Consequently, each election must be studied independently in order to assess the impact of foreign policy issues. Every electoral campaign takes place under different local and regional circumstances.

The international and domestic climate that surrounded the American presidential elections of 1996 was particularly unique. At home, the American economy had entered a phase of marked economic growth that helped absorb a considerable portion of the country's unemployed, a development which the administration credited as one of its major achievements although it was only partly responsible for bringing it about. Internationally, the elections took place against a backdrop in which there were no serious threats to American national security or any of its major allies. The contours of the "new" world order had begun to gel with the US as de facto leader, capable of steering world affairs in the service of American interests. Although, again, the current administration was not responsible for giving shape to this "new" world order and its policies were not immediately instrumental in removing any direct threat to American national security, it nevertheless sought to turn these factors to its advantage in the campaign. Clinton's rivals had to exert double the effort in order to convince the American voter of the need for change. Their efforts failed, if only because the American electorate naturally tends to vote for continuity over change.

Immediate foreign policy issues occupied only a limited portion of the electoral platforms of America's two major rival parties in 1996. They accounted for only 10 pages in the Democrats' published platform, beneath the heading "Security, Freedom and Peace." Only 20 pages of the over-100-page Republican platform were devoted to foreign policy issues beneath the heading "Restoring American World Leadership."

The Democratic platform commended the Clinton-Gore administration's successful endeavours in fostering peace efforts in various areas around the globe. Of particular interest to us here is that portion of the platform pertaining to the Middle East. The platform stated that the Democratic Party "remains committed to America's long-standing special relationship with Israel, based on shared values, a mutual commitment to democracy and a strategic alliance that benefits both nations. The United States should continue to help Israel maintain its qualitative edge... Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and should remain an undivided city accessible to people of all faiths. We also support close ties with states and peoples in the Arab and Islamic world committed to non-aggression and willing to take risks for peace."

It is important to add here that, under the section entitled "Meeting New Challenges," foremost among which it listed international terrorism, the platform stressed the Clinton administration's efforts, in conjunction with its allies, "to impose or maintain strong sanctions against states that sponsor terrorism, including Iran, Iraq, Libya and Sudan, and to make clear to Syria that normal relations depend on concrete steps to end its support for groups involved with terrorism."

The Republican Party platform, on the other hand, was clearly on the offensive. It was infused with an arrogance that disdained cooperation with others in the interests of achieving world peace. Only a militarily "strong America" can reach that aim. America's foreign policy should "put American interests first", above the interests of all other nations and the UN itself.

The Republican platform called for a "proactive, not a reactive" stance against those countries which foster terrorism and directed severely worded cautions to "the governments of North Korea, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Cuba" to let them know that "America's first line of defence is not our shoreline, but their own borders." The Republicans also targeted the flow of aid to Third World countries. The US should reduce the levels of foreign assistance allocations, particularly those channelled through international organisations and the UN, it argued, and concentrate instead on bilateral military assistance that would serve to strengthen American security interests abroad.

Finally, with regard to its position on the Middle East, "peace through strength" remained the cornerstone of Republican policy. Of particular note is the party's commitment to "support Israel's right to make its own decisions regarding security and boundaries"; the Republicans "strongly oppose the Clinton administration's attempts to interfere in Israel's democratic process". Simultaneously, the document "applauded" the legislation enacted by the Republican Congress which recognised Jerusalem as "the undivided capital of Israel" and pledged that a Republican administration, if elected, would "ensure that the US Embassy is moved to Jerusalem by May 1999."

Clearly, foreign policy issues did not occupy a primary or central focus in either platform. Nor were there fundamental differences between Democratic and Republican positions on foreign policy issues, despite the rhetoric in which their stances were couched. Nevertheless, foreign policy had to be mentioned, as the following will show.

Dole's aggressive campaign tactics were geared to appeal to that raucous, patriotic chauvinism best expressed by the ultra-conservative wing of the Republican Party. Dole attempted to play up his image as a heroic combat veteran, wounded in the course of action in World War II. It was as a toughened veteran that Dole approached the issues of national security, international terrorism and America's role in the new world order, charging his speeches with the rhetoric of the lone warrior. He constantly compared his hard-line stance with Clinton's "soft" policies, and warned that US troops would not serve under UN commanders.

Simultaneously, the Republican candidate tried to divest his rival of any distinguishing contribution to America's current status in the world order, which Dole attributed to the efforts of his Republican predecessors.

With respect to immigration policies and relations with Cuba, Dole stuck to a hard line; but in order to attract the Jewish vote, his only alternative was to attempt to outbid Clinton, whose administration had consistently supported Israeli policy. Netanyahu's election allowed Dole to stress his endorsement of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to criticise Clinton's evident bias for Peres, in an attempt to draw away some of the Democrats' traditional Jewish backing.

Dole did not succeed in marketing himself as effectively as planned to the American public. His failure is in part due to the more successful defensive strategy that Clinton pursued. Dole's personal attacks on Clinton were also perceived to have played in the Democratic candidate's favour.

Clinton, on the other hand, was quick to sense, particularly after the Congressional elections in 1994, that the mood of the American public was drifting toward the right. Clinton adviser Dick Morris, a former Republican, suggested that the candidate adopt right-wing foreign and domestic policies. This strategy, combined with Clinton's rhetorical skills and personal charisma, enabled him to win as a Democratic Party candidate with a Republican tenor on all domestic and foreign issues.

For his campaign to succeed, Clinton had to overcome two challenges. Dole's accusations that he was incapable of taking critical decisions were answered when the Iraqi forces crossed into the Security Council-supervised "safe haven" for the Kurds. Despite international outrage, Clinton mounted an independent American strike against Iraq. Dole had no choice but to declare his support for the action.

The second challenge Clinton faced was to avoid any crises that would oblige the US to involve forces in a military operation abroad. It was indeed fortunate that the American forces deployed in Bosnia according to the Dayton Agreement were not subjected to hostile action. Another Somalia would have damaged Clinton's ratings.

In the six months prior to the 1996 American presidential elections, several public opinion polls were conducted with regard to a number of issues related to American foreign policy. All polls confirmed that foreign policy issues ranked third after social and then economic issues in influencing voters' stance at the ballot box. A Harris poll conducted from 5 to 8 September concluded that only 13 per cent of the votes would be determined by foreign policy issues.

According to a dozen polls, most Americans believed that Dole was better equipped than Clinton to maintain America's military superiority and to handle certain economic issues (taxes and military expenditures). Other polls demonstrated a growing trend toward isolationism among the American public in the wake of the Cold War. The last set of indicators pertains to the American military strike against Iraq. A poll conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* from 7-10 September, immediately following the strike, revealed that 70 per cent of Americans supported it, while only 0.6 per cent considered the action excessively violent. Of those who approved the strike, 46 per cent found it appropriate, while 30 per cent thought that it was not severe enough.

In November 1996, the American public voted in favour of the status quo. The elections, however, were marked by a 50 per cent voter turnout, the lowest since 1924. Although these factors suggest that the current orientations of American foreign policy will continue, this by no means implies that this policy is immutable.

Clinton won 49 per cent of the total popular vote (as opposed to 41 per cent for Dole) and 379 of the votes of the electoral college (as opposed to only 159 votes for Dole). He only needed 270 votes to win. These results mark a major personal victory for Clinton, one that cannot easily be attributed to the Democratic Party that nominated him. Crowning this achievement is the fact that he is the first Democratic president to be elected for a second term of office since 1936, and the first Democratic president in the entire history of American presidential elections to enter the White House under a Republican Congress.

Dampening the impact of this situation, however, is the fact that Clinton received less than 50 per cent of the popular vote. In other words, more than 50 per cent of those who turned out to vote cast their ballot for another candidate. That, in addition, 50 per cent of the electorate did not turn out to vote at all indicates that the American public was not exactly rallied *en masse* behind a charismatic figure. Although the reigns of decision-making remained in Clinton's hands, there are numerous factors that may push for change in the president's thinking on all or specific dimensions of policy issues.

One of these factors is experience. During his first term of office, the president must acquaint himself with the topography of the international system from the vantage point of the most important leadership position in the world. In light of Clinton's relative youth and his openness to change in personal, human and occupational terms, one may expect a more mature style of international leadership during the second term.

The second factor is the relative freedom a second-term president enjoys when he no longer has to contend with the domestic electoral considerations that are generally so influential upon his decisions during the latter half of his first term in office. As foreign policy generally offers the greatest scope for a president to leave his personal mark, one can expect Clinton to turn his attention in that direction.

The dynamics of the international order may also compel the president to alter his scheme of foreign policy. In this respect, US policy in the Middle East may well head the list of policies that may be subject to re-evaluation and change.

The Republican Congress is also an important element to consider in assessing the prospects for continuity or change. This situation per se is not new. Conflict between the president and the Congress over foreign policy issues is a perpetual feature of US politics. At the same time, however, this conflict reflects differences over issues rather than allegiances along party lines. Over the past half century, furthermore, US foreign policy has tended to confirm areas of agreement between the two parties. Even in instances when electoral campaigns were characterised by markedly contrasting foreign policy platforms, one notes that the victor generally reverted to the stances of his predecessor.

In light of these considerations, one would not expect the current division of party control between the executive and the legislature to exert particular influence on the formulation of foreign policy. Differences may focus on the nature of the policies the president brings before the House and Senate, and his capacity to summon the necessary support. On the other hand, the Republicans do not possess the two-thirds majority necessary to overturn a presidential veto. As a result, US foreign policy in the coming phase will most likely reflect the customary bipartisanship over such issues, rather than a purely party line.

In fact, perhaps because of the intense acrimony that arose between the president and the Republican Congress over budgetary allocations, we may now be before a new mode of interaction between the two that could have enormous bearing on US policy and foreign policy in particular. Directly after the elections, Clinton expressed his desire to see closer cooperation between the two parties. His appeal met with a very positive response among the Republicans. The president's nomination of the Republican Senator William Cohen as minister of defence was an affirmation of this new trend, which some have heralded as the post-partisan era, which in turn would enhance the prospects for greater common ground between the two parties over foreign policy issues. Evidently, the appointment of Madeleine Albright, an ultra-conservative Democrat, as secretary of state was also intended to appease the Republicans. In all events, it is clear that Clinton's second term has brought changes in a number of positions connected with foreign policy decision-making. This alone is an indicator that speaks for change over continuity.

The national security advisor and the director of the CIA, furthermore, have been closely involved in foreign affairs and are fully familiar with the intricacies of US foreign policy under the previous Clinton administration. Their appointments may signal fundamental changes in the new administration's priorities (closer monitoring of affairs in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union for example), as well as an attempt to bring about closer coordination in the flow of information necessary for foreign policy decision-making.

We may, therefore, expect continuity in the general lines of policy, with some modification due to the increased personal style of the president combined with a drift toward the conservative right; as represented by the new political appointees. In practical terms, we will most likely be seeing a harder American line against those nations accused of supporting terrorism; a stronger drive to impose US hegemony over the world order, combined with greater support for a NATO role and expanding NATO membership in spite of Russia's position; increased US pressure for UN reforms involving reductions in expenditures and the redistribution of dues among member nations; greater propensity to wield relative US military and political status in the world in order to secure economic gains and open new markets; and, finally, further reductions in the levels of US aid, and particularly financial assistance to Third World countries, along with the restructuring of the US foreign aid programme to bring it into line with US security strategies (combating "terrorism", banning the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and supporting allied states) and its economic strategies (financing economic restructuralisation programmes and opening new markets).

As for the international situation, *Time* magazine, on 18 November 1996, listed the challenges the second Clinton administration will face: post-Yeltsin Russia; China after Deng Xiaoping; the unification of European currency; the potential collapse of the Middle East peace process; mass extermination, AIDS and economic catastrophe in Africa; the spread of fundamentalist Islam from Iran to Afghanistan and central Asia; Canada's efforts to win over US trading partners and opposition to restrictions on investment in Cuba; Mexico's stability and the problem of illegal immigration; Latin America's doubts about Clinton's intentions

Regardless of whether or not these issues are priorities on the new administration's agenda, they are clearly matters it will have to contend with. For brevity's sake, I will focus here on the Middle East.

If Clinton does indeed devote increased attention to foreign policy as the area in which he will most likely be able to score a historic achievement, then the Middle East, for obvious reasons, will absorb most of his focus. Clinton's direct involvement in international politics, however, is largely restricted to the experience he has gained during his first term of office. He will therefore be heavily dependent on his aides, the secretary of state, the national security advisor and the director of the CIA. None of these three individuals can be considered experts in Middle East affairs. Nor are any of them capable, given their intellectual background, professional experience and political allegiances, of understanding the Arab position in the Arab-Israeli struggle objectively. All of them, by virtue of their political ambitions and personal and party affiliations, are inclined to sympathise with and defend the Zionist point of view.

Albright, whose appointment was important to Clinton for domestic political considerations (as a woman and as a politician acceptable to the Republicans) will be in a position to play the key role in formulating US policy in the coming phase. Her appointment was a grave disappointment to the Arabs, because of her personal antagonism toward the renewal of Boutros Ghali's term as UN secretary-general and her well-known ties with Zionist circles in the US. Her limited experience with the Arab world means that her thinking will be dominated by the prevalent views in the US, toward Iraq in particular and perhaps toward Libya. She will take more hard-line positions than her predecessor, particularly in light of the fact that she unreservedly defends the recourse to military force in attaining political objectives.

Clinton's second term, therefore, will be even more pro-Israeli than the first, which was already on record as the most pro-Israeli administration in US history. Clinton, however, had originally gambled that he would be dealing with Peres and not Netanyahu, with whom his relations are strained at best. The core issue at the moment, furthermore, is not America's pro-Israeli stance. This has always been the case. Rather, it is the prospect of achieving quiet in this vital area of the globe where the US has enormous strategic interests. The Arabs may be pressured to give further concessions. The "concessions" that Netanyahu hopes to secure, however, are impossible for the Arab governments to offer, regardless of how subordinate they may be to the US. In this context, the prospect of peace and support from Netanyahu may well be irreconcilable. This is the real challenge the US must face in this region. Yet, should Madeleine Albright reach this conclusion, she may be the very person to rise to the challenge, given the fierceness with which she is known to defend her convictions.

In light of the above, I predict that relations between the Arab governments and the "new/old" US administration will be quite strained over the next months. If the Arabs succeed in portraying Israel as the sole cause behind the stalled peace process, however, and if the US is convinced that its interests in the Arab world will be severely jeopardised unless some fundamental progress is made, the US administration will have no choice but to exert pressure upon Israel in order to rescue this process from its current crisis.

Past experience, however, tells us that Israel will not sit back and wait for this development to transpire. Most likely, the Israeli government has already sensed that pressures upon it are imminent, and will probably seek to escalate the situation militarily, on the Syrian and Lebanese fronts, and politically, on the Egyptian front. On the other hand, Israel may wait for the US to escalate the confrontation with Iran, which appears increasingly likely in light of recent reports that Iran may have been involved in the explosion in Riyadh which caused the death of dozens of US soldiers. A US strike against Iran would place indirect pressure on both Syria and Lebanon. Simultaneously, the chain of reactions would shift the focus of tension once again to the Gulf and alleviate pressures on Israel as attention is focused on the issue of "international terrorism" as the world's top priority. This development would also impede the Middle East peace process.

The current US administration appears perfectly prepared for this scenario and the Israeli lobby in the US would be in an easy position to exert pressure in this direction.

Can the Arabs conduct their foreign relations in a manner that would make exerting pressure upon Israel the only alternative the new US administration has before it?

The writer is a professor of political science at Cairo University.

Whether in terms of its arms sales or overseas troop deployments, post-Cold War America is the uncontested military master of the world. **Galal Nassar** explores aspects of US military strategy in the Middle East, where it faces the unique dilemma of balancing American interests in the oil-rich Gulf with those of Israel, its number one regional ally

America rules the waves

Star Wars notwithstanding, mastery over the seas continues to be a condition of global power

Prior to resigning from office, William Perry, the former United States defence secretary, submitted a report to President Bill Clinton and the American Congress delineating with precision the American strategy to assert world supremacy.

"The presence and deployment of the American armed forces overseas in peacetime continues to be the cornerstone of the US strategy for national security, and of the national military strategy. American military presence overseas in time of peace is the most evident proof of the US commitment to defend its interests and those of its allies in the main areas throughout the world," the report stated.

US naval power is considered the backbone of America's strength and influences in all parts of the world. Aircraft carriers and their accompanying groups are the *principal components of that strength. The US possesses the largest number of* carriers of any country in the world — 17 different types as of the end of 1992. Armed with highly developed equipment, they are capable of imposing the US strategy of supremacy, as described by William Perry.

During Perry's tenure of office, the US navy had 12 aircraft carriers, five of the traditional type and seven nuclear ones. Five others were withdrawn from service, some of which were kept in storage. The Americans believe that the number of aircraft carriers currently available is adequate to handle any task required in current world affairs and in the foreseeable future. They could also ensure the promotion of US strategy in the event of the outbreak of two wars in Third World countries. If necessary, two of the carriers kept in storage could be re-equipped and put back into active service in a short time, thereby raising the number of serviceable carriers to 14.

Aircraft carriers occupy pride of place in the current thinking of US political and military planners. Their relative prominence has risen steadily since the '40s. Since then, three main phases in US military strategy have been identified. In the first phase, from the late '40s to the early '60s, the US adopted the "total reprisal" strategy. During this period, the tendency was to join naval and air forces on the basis of the use of nuclear weapons in any anticipated war.

In the second phase, during the late '60s, the "flexible retaliation" strategy emerged: being prepared for armed conflict with other countries with or without the use of nuclear *weapons. Strategic bombers and aircraft carriers provided the mainstay of this policy.*

From the early '70s — the third phase — the US developed its strategy into one of "total and confirmed destruction". This meant transporting the strategic attack force to the open oceans and seas, using large-scale deployment and building up naval forces, in which aircraft carriers are assigned a principal role.

This gave rise to the notion that the bulk of missiles and bombers could be shifted from US territory to aircraft carriers.

Suffice to say that the carriers in the Red Sea, the Mediterranean and the Arab Gulf were capable of destroying the Iraqi military capabilities during the Kuwait liberation war in 1991.

The size of the US fleet also enables America to consolidate its relations with countries which enjoy a favourable status with Washington by conducting joint military manoeuvres with the naval and air forces of these countries.

Such joint war games are held almost annually by the US and various Gulf countries. *The US and Egypt conduct joint exercises dubbed "Bright Star" every two years.*

US FLEETS AND AIRCRAFT CARRIERS WORLDWIDE AT PRESENT

FLEET	RANGE OF OPERATION	NO. OF CARRIERS
THE SECOND	EAST ATLANTIC (EUROPE)	4-5
THE THIRD	EAST PACIFIC (W. AMERICA)	5
THE SIXTH	MEDITERRANEAN	1
THE SEVENTH	WEST PACIFIC (JAPAN)	1
THE TOTAL		11-12



An Egyptian family looks on as the USS Enterprise passes through the Suez Canal, heading for the Gulf *(photo: AP)*

Open arms

The United States, seeking to maintain its leading share in the international arms market, finds the Middle East particularly lucrative

The United States views its foreign arms trade as a matter of top national priority, and rightly so. In the post-Cold War era, the United States is not only the top world power. It is the world's leading arms monger. Its share of the international weapons market has grown from 13 per cent in 1986 to 70 per cent in 1994. A success story, considering the global weapons market shrank to almost half its size during the same period.

Nearly half a million Americans are currently employed in the arms industry, making it even more crucial for the American administration to maintain the success of its military industry and trade.

But it is not just money and jobs. Barring the European Union or an Asia with a political clout matching its economic power, *the United States hopes* to perpetuate its position as the world's reigning superpower. Its weapon *sales help it wield the* international leverage commensurate with superpower status.

In 1993, the US trade secretary told American arms manufacturers that his department would help them find buyers in the international market.

Former Defence Secretary William Perry signalled a new marketing policy during a Latin American tour last year. He *stated his country's warm* approval of arms requests from Argentina and Brazil and its readiness to sell them the F-16 attack planes. Previously Washington had discouraged such sales.

And, for those countries unable to afford fancy new weapons, the Pentagon can provide, on grant basis, old weapons from its Cold War days. It all boils down to shrewd marketing, for the practice strenghtens ties with foreign military services; customers, that is.

It also helps to save millions of dollars which the Pentagon would have spent on disposing *of these arms.*

Israel received, from old US stockpiles, a number of F-15 *fighter planes and CH-35* helicopters. Mexico obtained thousands of M-1 guns. Greece got F-4 and A-7 military planes, M-60 tankers and several guided rockets. Turkey obtained AH-1 helicopters, M-60 tanks and Howitzer guns. And, Egypt hopes to get a large number of tanks, aircraft and warships from surplus US stock.

The Pentagon has shown certain initiative in its bid to boost US arms sales. For example, the US Air Force sold used F-16's to countries which could not afford to purchase the latest models. The Air Force then used the funds to purchase top-of-the-line craft.

The Pentagon also helped Kuwait sell its stock of A-4 planes, encouraging it to buy F-18 planes and AH-64 Apache helicopters.

The Arab Gulf is high on the US marketing agenda.

Arab Gulf states, particularly following Iraq's invasion of *Kuwait, recognised the need to* strengthen their defense. Sizeable portions of their *budgets are dedicated to military* spending. Their main supplier of weapons: America.

In the Gulf, however, the United States is more than just a salesman. A major task of the *US Central Command is to* ensure security and stability of the region. A senior US military *official noted, during a tour of* Gulf states, that the security of countries situated in the Arab *Gulf and Middle East is of* utmost importance to the United States.

Close military cooperation between the United States and Arab Gulf states is a function of mutual interests. The United States helps out with security. In return, it has a foothold in a region *that commands 70 per* cent of the world's oil reserves and miles of strategically-sensitive waterways, and a lucrative weapons business to boot.

The Florida-based US Central Command, founded in 1983, coordinates rapid intervention missions overseas. Countries on its list of possible action are mostly from the Middle East: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Somalia, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Three's a crowd

Would Israeli pressure be enough to prevent the conclusion of a US-Saudi arms deal

A potential Saudi bid to purchase 102 F-16 fighters has Saudi-US relations in a state of tension and pundits are wondering whether Israel's vehement opposition to the deal will result in its collapse.

In what amounted to a test of the special ties linking the US and Saudi Arabia, Saudi Prince Sultan Ibn Abdel-Aziz last month braved the dank weather of Washington for a visit to the US, accompanied by Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faysal. One week prior to the visit, the *Washington Times* reported that Saudi Arabia is considering submitting a request to purchase the state-of-the-art US fighters, along with other instruments and equipment, in a package valued at $30 billion.

But, according to one Pentagon spokesman, the report by the US newspaper was misleading. "President Clinton's administration has not been officially notified by the Saudi government regarding the purchase of the aircraft," he said. His statements, however, did not entirely rule out the possibility that the deal would be concluded. The spokesman noted that the Pentagon was aware of the Saudi Air Force's desire to replace its ageing F-5 fighters with more up-to-date planes. The US Department of Defence, he added, recognises this concern and has confirmed that the Clinton administration will be working with Saudi Arabia to fulfil their military requirements.

Despite the denials of both the Pentagon and Prince Sultan, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu asserted that the purpose of the trip was to clinch the deal. Furthermore, he stated that Israel would ask President Bill Clinton to block the sale of any advanced military fighter planes to Saudi Arabia since such a sale would jeopardise the regional balance of power.

Informed sources in Washington confirmed to *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Saudi prince's Washington visit dealt with a variety of issues, including the F-16 deal. The matter may not have been discussed officially, but both sides have addressed the issue and it is now open for debate. To that end, a Saudi military committee will go to the US within the next two months to discuss the technical details of the deal which, if successfully concluded, would be announced before the end of the year.

While denials and confirmations of the deal are hurled back and forth, one factor emerges that is indisputable — Washington, as a result of Saudi oil wealth and the kingdom's strategic value to the US, has often met similar requests.

Moreover, despite official denials concerning the deal, administration officials explained that the objectives of Prince Sultan's Washington talks were not only to muster support for the deal in anticipation of strong Congressional resistance spurred on by the Israeli lobby, but also to discuss mutual security concerns, the proliferation of long-range missiles in the Middle East and to reaffirm US understanding of the strategic role Saudi Arabia plays in the region.

On the Saudi side, Prince Sultan was eager to secure US support for his policies and to prove that he is capable of strengthening the ties between the two nations by maintaining a level of cooperation in matters of defence and armaments. Prince Sultan's efforts assume increased importance in light of the reported struggle for succession between Crown Prince Abdullah and Prince Sultan when King Fahd was taken ill.

Israel, understandably, has taken an active interest in the Saudi prince's trip. Netanyahu has made clear his intention of blocking the deal and, to that end, has begun to mobilise the support of the Jewish lobby groups in Congress as well as in the US Departments of Defence and State and the National Security Council.

For the Saudis, this situation brings to mind another dispute which surfaced in the late 1980s concerning a missile deal between Saudi Arabia and China. While the Israelis were adamantly opposed to the deal, the US voiced its concerns but understood that such a deal was necessary in view of what American policy has identified as the "dual threat" to regional stability posed by Iran and Iraq.

With the F-16 deal, Clinton is now backed into a similar corner where a balance must be struck between US security interests and Israeli pressures. Consequently, there are several scenarios that may result from the US-Saudi discussion and Israeli pressure tactics.

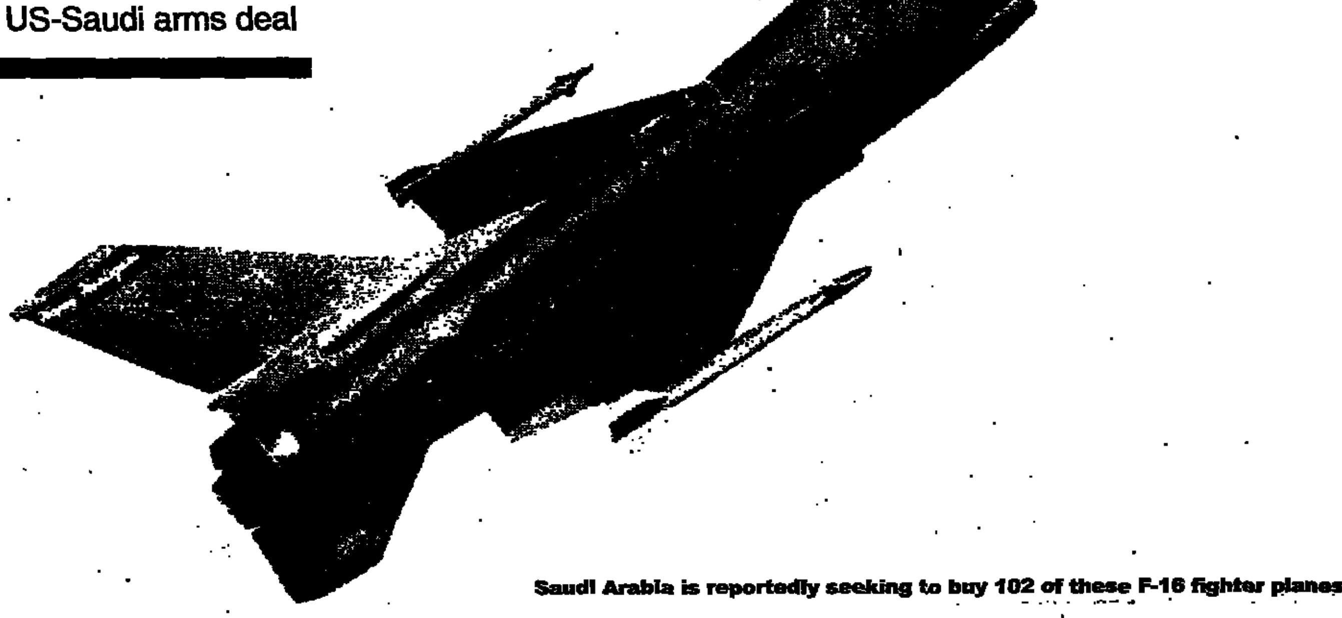
First, Congress may approve the deal despite Israeli opposition, as it did previously with the "Sun of Peace" F-16 sale to Saudi Arabia. However, financing the deal could pose a problem given that Saudi Arabia lacks the sufficient liquidity. In this respect, financing could be partially secured through oil or other trade initiatives.

The second option is that the US refuses the deal either as a result of Israeli pressure or Saudi financial problems. To cover this possibility, the Saudis have not placed all their eggs in one basket and may purchase European fighters instead. Immediately following his US trip, Prince Sultan traveled to France, a country with which Saudi Arabia already has a sizeable military deal in the works. Known as the "Mast Project", this Saudi-French deal is aimed at developing and upgrading the Saudi naval forces.

Moreover, France also seeks to conclude a contract with the Saudi armed forces for the sale of advanced Mirage and Rafale fighter jets.

Aside from the French, Saudi Arabia could find a willing partner in Great Britain. In 1985, Britain concluded a defence deal with Saudi Arabia described as the "deal of the century". The $35 billion contract included a bevy of equipment including Tornado-IDS fighters, Hawk fighters, mine-sweepers and state-of-the-art air defence systems.

The third and most likely scenario actually affects US-Israeli relations more than it does the US-Saudi deal. In this scenario, the US would conclude the deal with Saudi Arabia, providing them with technically-modified F-16s as it did with the F-16E fighters in the past. But to offset criticism from Israel, the US would dangle a ripe carrot in the form of new weapons sales to it, possibly including the coveted Stealth bomber, and a series of financial incentives. Washington has consistently offered Israel such incentive packages whenever it concluded an arms deal with a country Israel viewed as a threat to its security interests.



Saudi Arabia is reportedly seeking to buy 102 of these F-16 fighter planes

Expats want more than talk

Despite government efforts to attract investment, Egyptian expatriates still have some reservations about the application of the new investment laws. **Mona El-Fiqi** reports.



The government's recent efforts to draw foreign investments, including Egyptian expatriate savings, have been far-reaching and, to an extent, successful. So, it was in this context that a new set of investment laws were placed before the People's Assembly for consideration.

And last week, Youssef Wali, deputy prime minister, at the annual conference for Egyptian expatriate businessmen, which was organised by the General Investment Authority, sought to drive this point home. Speaking at the conference's opening ceremony, before a gathering which included six other ministers and some 275 Egyptian expatriate businessmen, Wali stressed that the government is dedicated to providing investors with a series of guarantees and incentives through the new draft investment law being discussed in parliament.

The draft law, he said, seeks to encourage investment in the New Valley through incentives such as providing investors in Toshki with a 20-year tax exemption and, possibly, free land. The new law also entitles foreign investors to own the land on which they have set up their projects.

Building on Wali's statements, other ministers and key government industrial figures were eager to promote the role Egyptian expatriates can play in both soliciting new investments and promoting the country's economic growth.

Mohamed Ibrahim Soleiman, minister of housing, said that investment in the new industrial cities have already led to the implementation of 1,710 investment projects which, in turn, have provided nearly 200,000 new job opportunities.

Also painting a rosy investment picture, Mohieddin El-Gharib, the minister of finance, predicted that the tax burden will be reduced.

While investors and expatriates are impressed with these promises, they are wary that they will turn out to be just that — promises.

"The main problems are always the difficulty of implementing government decrees or laws," said Mahmoud Sabri, an Egyptian businessman who has been living in Germany for the last 37 years.

To secure a licence for his project in Egypt, Sabri recalled, he had to wait for two years before the General Investment Authority finally completed the paperwork and approved his request.

"I also had to present a feasibility study for the project before the licence was approved," he recalled. "This is not something that is required anywhere else in the world."

Hamdi El-Labban, an Egyptian businessman who has lived in Canada for more than 10 years, agreed with Sabri's complaints.

"There's always a lot of impressive talk, but no action," he stated, adding that it is unrealistic to expect an investor to wait two years to secure a licence.

El-Labban, in order to become better acquainted with Egypt's new investment climate, has attended the last five expatriate conferences. One of the conclusions he has reached, unfortunately, is that a nerve-wracking bureaucracy is the country's main obstacle to securing more investments.

There are, moreover, other equally daunting hurdles to overcome, such as inflated real estate prices. With the price of land in Egypt sometimes reaching $10,000 per square metre, investing in Egypt, he said, can often be more costly than investing in the US or Canada.

"Another example is the price of a ton of cement which, in Egypt, can reach $70 while in the US and Canada it is only $30," stated El-Labban. "It's corrupt practices on the part of Egyptian cement companies which drive up the price."

There are, however, specific incidents which he says truly undermine investment promotion efforts. El-Labban recalled the time when the Tax Authority refused to grant the Egyptian Expatriates for Investment and Development Company a five-year tax exemption. "Officials claimed that according to the law, only the projects are tax exempt, not the companies," he said. But "how, then, can we have projects without companies," he queried. The company has since filed suit against the Tax Authority in the Court of Appeals.

Neither El-Labban nor Sabri were alone in voicing their concerns that laws may not be translated into action. Sobhi Shehata, an Egyptian who has spent the past 20 years in the US, explained that investors, like tourists, are looking for security as well as opportunity.

Investors, he stated, have the right to look around for different kinds of guarantees before committing their money to a project. "Egypt is considered a new investment market for both Egyptian and foreign investors, but the government needs to take decisive action to protect investors from the cumbersome bureaucracy," stressed Shehata.

The proposed investment laws, he continued, are an excellent starting point, but they must be successfully and effectively implemented for investors to bring their capital into Egypt. To this end, Egyptian expatriates, stated Shehata, can play a major role in encouraging other investors, but only if they, themselves, are happy with the investment climate.

Age of the investment banker

As the once arid landscape of the national economy opens onto new vistas of macro success and stock market optimism, a new breed of bankers is making its debut, **Aziza Sami** writes

With the private sector assuming a more vigorous role in the Egyptian economy, the banking system is turning its eye to greener pastures. It hopes to boost its profitability through closer involvement in investment transactions, a myriad of which has been spawned by the ongoing process of privatisation and the forceful comeback of the stock exchange.

Two leading banks, the Commercial International Bank (CIB) and Misr International Bank (MiBank) have set up investment banking arms. Other banks will follow suit, but the ground is not entirely charted.

Under the state-run economy of the past three decades, banking basically meant commercial banking: taking deposits, giving credit, and generally keeping the wheels of domestic and foreign trade in motion. And, prior to the recent wave of privatisation and the revival of the stock exchange, bankers were happy to dwell within these dull but secure confines.

"There was no capital market. The market was fully regulated by the Central Bank. Banks were making very high margins on traditional lending, so there was no need to look any further," said Mohamed Ozalp, MiBank senior general manager.

Ozalp pointed out that there are several banks in Egypt which call themselves investment banks but practically are little more than commercial banks, just with a longer-term lending perspective.

The difference between commercial and investment banking, explained Ozalp, is that the former relies on funds that are deposited and then lent out, whereas investment banking focuses on moving funds straightaway from investor to investment.

An investment bank, in other words, helps investors place their money into the capital market, i.e. into equities. It also advises companies wishing to issue shares and bonds into the stock market.

The functions of investment banking, therefore, combine, among other things, the role of a brokering firm with that of consultancy companies.

It was only with the reform of the financial sector and the issuance of the Capital Market Law (Law 95) in 1992, that banks were able to develop their investment operations. Stock market brokerage firms, such as the Egyptian Financial Group (EFG), and other companies founded by the banks, played a vital role in this process.

A good example of investment banking is the CIB's Commercial International Investment Company (CIIC,) established in 1994.

The CIIC owns 28.5 per cent of the equity it manages, thus assuming a market exposure entailing regulatory risk, says Adel El-Labban, CIB managing director.

In 1993, CIB undertook an IPO (International Public Offering), issuing stock worth LE390 million, in order to expand its core banking activities and diversify into investment banking.

This step helped the bank establish its own corporate advisory service.

The CIIC advises companies on share valuations, restructurings, acquisitions and mergers. It has brought closed-share holding companies to the stock market and acted as an adviser in several privatisation moves, getting involved in five out of 10 cases in which public-sector companies were sold in their entirety.

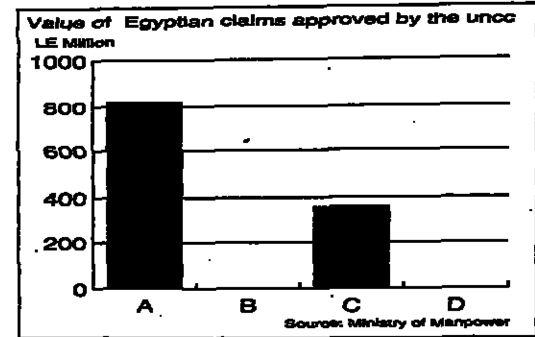
But despite its bold entry onto Egypt's economic scene, investment banking still has teething problems. Once these are resolved, the prospects for growth are bright.

"The realm of invesment banking is still very small in Egypt," said Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz , chairman of the Egyptian Bankers Union.

"There is much to be done in terms of upcoming privatisations and the issuing of bonds. We have only had four bond issues so far, a very small number considering the size of the market," he added, pointing out that there is still "a lot more room for expansion."

This room is what many investment bankers are eager to step into. Already, a new generation of them is scanning their computer screens for the latest in a world of global portfolios, real-time transactions and, they promise us, opportunity.

Egyptians get war compensation



Egyptian workers displaced from Kuwait will now receive their compensation cheques, reports **Mona El-Fiqi**

Nearly 23,300 Egyptians, who were forced to flee Kuwait and leave their jobs as a result of the Iraqi invasion, will receive their compensations from the United Nations Compensations Commission (UNCC) by the end of April.

Abdel-Qader El-Asser, the Ministry of Manpower's international cooperation consultant, said that "the UNCC has deposited in the ministry's account at the Central Bank of Egypt $58.3 million, the first instalment of the Category A compensation claims."

The UNCC had approved 299,000 Egyptian Category A claims, valued at $823 million. These claims will be paid in six instalments over the coming 18 months, and each claimant will receive between $2,500 and $8,000.

With the cash in hand, El-Asser stated that the ministry has begun writing the cheques based on a list sent by the UNCC.

"Each claimant will receive his cheque from the labour office in their respective town or city by the end of April," said the ministry consultant.

In addition to the payments for Category A claims, funds have already been disbursed in several of the other categories. Compensation in excess of $1.3 million has been paid to Category B claimants. Category B relates to death or serious injury resulting from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Moreover, the UNCC has approved 48,000 out of a total 93,000 Egyptian Category C claims. The value of the approved claims in this category which deals with financial loss resulting from the Iraqi invasion is $362.3 million. The UNCC, however, has yet to approve any of the 95 Egyptian Category D claims, relating to loss of property valued at more than $100,000.

The money for UNCC's compensation payments comes from 30 per cent of the proceeds of the sale of Iraqi oil, as spelled out in UN Security Council Resolution 986, also known as the oil-for-food deal.

Labour uneasy about early retirement

An eagerly-awaited early exit or an early death? A government scheme designed to encourage early retirement among public sector workers has sparked off a heated controversy. **Mariz Tadros** reports

It took personal intercession by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, but finally the long-awaited early retirement scheme is ready.

The cabinet's ad-hoc committee on privatisation has approved the scheme, saying that, for the time being, it will be solely offered to workers in loss-making public sector companies.

According to the scheme, men between the ages of 50 and 58 and women between the ages of 45 and 58 are eligible for early retirement provided they have been employed for upwards of 20 years. The scheme, which is optional, allows workers to retire early at a reduced pension in return for a one-time lump sum payment ranging between LE12,000 and LE 35,000.

But this lump sum, says Mohamed Mursi, secretary-general of the Trade Union Federation, is inadequate, considering the amount that would have been payable by law if the period of service had been completed.

For example, explains Mursi, a worker who retires before the age of 45 will receive a pension that is 15 per cent less than what would have been his due had he waited until his normal retirement age. Similarly, a worker retiring at 50 will receive 10 per cent less in pension and one who retires at 55 will receive 5 per cent less.

This lump sum compensation is not the best way to tackle the problem of excess employment in the public sector, says Saad El-Din Khalifa, commercial consultant for a state-owned wood factory in Shubra El-Kheima. Khalifa suggests that workers become shareholders in the company, or in a specially-designed social insurance fund.

The government scheme, Khalifa argues, makes no satisfactory allowance for the future of workers, many of whom have never experienced any career move before in their life.

"By the time they are in their fifties, they are unable to work in any other place because their skills are limited by the physically challenging nature of their jobs," Khalifa points out.

Workers at the Egyptian Company for the Manufacture of Wood were less than enthusiastic about the early retirement scheme:

One worker said, "My salary is LE85, like so many workers here. What would my early retirement pension amount to according to the existing criteria? Almost nothing. I thank God for this small salary because at least it is something we live on from day to day. But to take one lump sum that could be very easily lost in an unsuccessful venture is too risky, especially for someone like me. My future would be over."

Another worker exclaimed, "Well, let's assume that any one of us gets a high of LE30,000 as a lump sum compensation payment. Do you think that would be even enough to cover one serious surgical operation once I am no longer covered by the company's medical insurance plan?"

Most of the company's workers agreed that they would prefer to see the funds earmarked for the scheme spent on the purchase of new equipment for the company and on guaranteeing the regular supply of raw materials. Such a policy, they argue, can save their company and, consequently, their jobs, a point with which some experts concur. "Let's face it, these companies were bankrupt because of bad management and because the labourers hardly worked," declared Ezzeddin Shawkat of the Social Fund for Development (SFD), which is partly funded by the World Bank and aims to counter the negative effects of privatisation on the workforce.

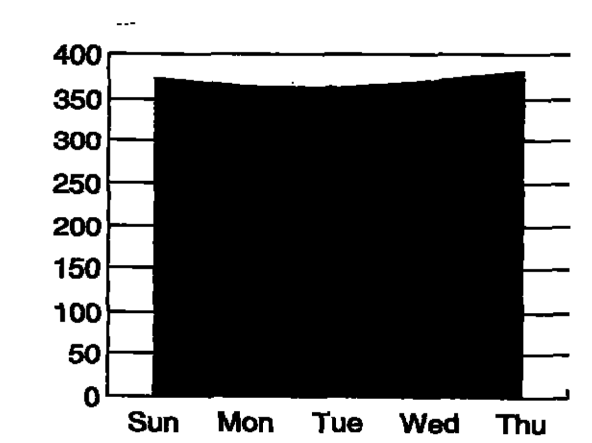
Shawkat pointed out that some workers come to be re-hired by the very companies they left once they undergo the right kind of retraining. For example, a carpenter who was employed as an office boy for 18 years doing almost nothing was re-hired by the same shipyard that made him redundant after he received retraining as an electrician.

Gouda Abdel-Khalek, professor of economics at Cairo University, questions the very concept behind the scheme. He wonders if there can be really surplus labour "when public enterprises have been very strict about employing new workers for at least the past 10 years". Abdel-Khalek is also sceptical about the economic implications of the scheme:

"If you take the official figures for the capital costs of generating one job, which is on average LE50,000, how will they [the workers] be able to provide an alternative employment opportunity on LE30,000?"

Abdel-Khalek urges the allocation of funds to retrain workers and alleviate their transitional doldrums. Otherwise, he warned, they would be left facing a competitive and aggressive market with little preparation or relief.

Market report



GMI marginal recovery

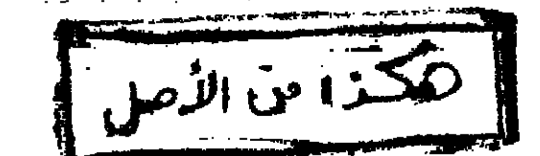
THE GENERAL Market Index gained 2.74 points during the week ending 27 March, while the volume of transactions stabilised at LE314.9 million. Market experts attributed this increase to the floatation of 2.08 million shares of the Cairo Housing and Urbanisation Company. The new offering, which was worth LE51.81 million, accounted for 16.45 per cent of total market turnover and 38 per cent of the total shares traded this week.

In the manufacturing sector, milling companies had a good week, with four of the six mills listed on the exchange witnessing an increase in their share value. Shares of the Upper Egypt Mills Company gained 9.06 per cent to close at LE90.52. In the red this week was the Cairo and Giza Mills and Bakeries Company, whose stock registered a 5.46 per cent decrease before leveling off at LE76.34. Also on the manufacturing sector, shares of the Egypt Iron and Steel Company was the market's big winner, gaining 23.26 per cent of its opening value to close at LE7.63. On the flip side, shares of the Engineering and Construction Industries Company dropped by 15.89 per cent to close at LE9.05.

Investors in financial sector companies this week had little reason to smile, as shares of the Nationale Societe Generale Bank lost LE20.5 to close at LE995, while those of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) dropped by LE4.02 to finally settle at LE84.06.

In all, the shares of 47 companies increased in value, 39 decreased and 37 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



An article front-paged by *Al-Ahram* in 1901 underscored the newspaper's interest in social ills and ways of dealing with them. Some of these problems were created or exacerbated by Egypt's strong exposure to European influence in the second half of the 19th century. Others were caused by the emergence of a new middle class of government employees in urban centres and a landed gentry in the countryside. Ignorance and superstition also played an important role in social misconduct.. In this instalment of the *Diwan* series, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** reviews the social scene at the turn of the century and selects stories reported by *Al-Ahram* to illustrate his findings

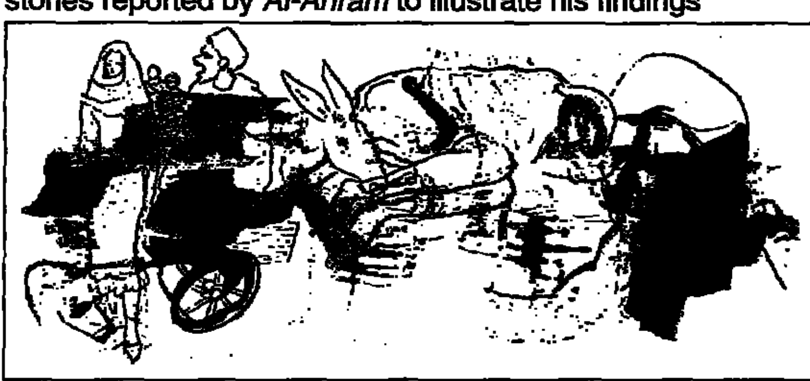


illustration: Makram Henein

It was an article by Girgis Hawi, an unknown lawyer in Zifti, that took up the bulk of the front page in *Al-Ahram* of 23 September 1901. Under the headline, "Laxity not negligence", the author painted a vivid portrait of the most serious flaws that afflicted Egyptian society at the time.

Topping the list was squalor. He wrote, "Refuse and dung are thrown on roof tops; animal carcasses are flung into drainage and irrigation canals; merchants sell rotten and deliberately damaged fruits and vegetables; children are left to roam the streets and alleys in which disease is rife. All of these are deleterious to the physical life of the nation."

Hawi was incensed by moral misconduct or "indecent exposure" as he put it: "One sees the dregs of society flaunting their ill manners. They pass through the major thoroughfares in clothes offensive to all sense of decency and modesty. They bathe in the Nile within a stone's throw or closer of respectable homes in full view of chaste women and virgins. Passers-by flush in embarrassment when suddenly they hear and see the foul language and obscene gestures of this lot."

He also condemned those itinerant fortune tellers with their fraudulent claims of being able to predict the future, interpret dreams and read seashells and the like.

Of course, Hawi never experienced the frightfully over-crowded, traffic-jammed and noisy cities of Egypt today. However, he did condemn "the noise, commotion and disruption of public tranquillity day and night caused by perpetual wailing and shouting."

Flipping through the pages of *Al-Ahram* editions of the turn of the century, we note that the attention the newspaper devoted to this provincial lawyer was in keeping with its editorial position on several social ills which had increased in severity at the time. We also note from our perusal of these pages that many of these problems were linked to and perhaps exacerbated by larger phenomena and trends affecting Egyptian society.

Egypt's exposure to Western civilisation prompted a re-evaluation of numerous customs and traditions that many began to perceive as inappropriate to the winds of intellectual change that had begun to course so powerfully through Egyptian society at the time. Although the modernisation first manifested itself in numerous aspects of material life, it was not long before it would impinge upon those ideas and values that had so long been taken for granted.

Economic developments of the 19th century also gave rise to a class of rural notables as well as a burgeoning *effendi* or government functionary class in the urban centres. Among the former we note the emergence of new and previously unfamiliar social mores and customs which *Al-Ahram* has duly observed and commented upon. The *effendi* class too adopted its share of new manners and customs, but with such superficiality that the word 'civilised' in *Al-Ahram*'s lexicon took on a pointedly ironic hue.

Many of these classes were influenced by the large expatriate communities, notably the Greeks and Italians, who brought with them new and unfamiliar customs. Not infrequently, *Al-Ahram* had cause to criticise these newfangled practices, whether because they were considered "offensive to proper moral conduct and sensibilities" or because they contributed to the spread of harmful habits such as alcoholism and drug abuse.

But Egypt at the turn of the century was also a society that had not entirely left the feudal age. As one would expect, superstition still held sway over the backwaters of thought, as is documented by *Al-Ahram*.

It was a time when story-tellers and bards still enthralled their audiences with myths and legends. "Should you take it upon yourself to walk in certain areas of Alexandria and Cairo and the countryside," comments an *Al-Ahram* correspondent, "you will find story-tellers in the coffeehouses sitting on stools or platforms so as to be at an elevation above that of their audiences. With a book of myth or legend in their hand, they recite their tales with dramatic voices and gesticulate as though they were actors."

The author has nothing but contempt for such myths and legends. He advises his readers to read proper history books and "to scorn such fantasies that lead the mind astray and spread ignorance." Clearly this author did not discern the importance of such narratives that would later acquire the status of folk literature and attract corps of researchers and scholars in universities.

Fear of the evil eye was so commonplace that *Al-Ahram* could not help but give it prominent attention. This belief, according to the newspaper, ruined the lives of many and frequently made them the object of jest. "Some people who have waited a long time to have children and are finally blessed with a son are so fearful that the evil eye might befall him that they keep him from people's view. In so doing they keep him out of fresh air and sunlight and sometimes do not bathe him. They refuse to acknowledge that their child has any beautiful features so as not to attract the envious eye. Only when he reaches the age of six will they allow him out of doors where he appears pallid and fragile." Customarily, there was a ceremony attending this first appearance in public. The child was made to ride a donkey backwards and "wear a woollen cap to which chicken and pigeon feathers had been attached. His face would be painted in black, red and white stripes. Then the father would gather children of the alleyway around his son and they would cry out, 'Boy with the feathers, long may you live!'"

The *zar*, a popular form of exorcism generally practiced by women, came under vehement attack in *Al-Ahram*. Evidently it had been the custom of some women to hold this superstitious ritual in the vicinity of the saints' tombs, provoking the *naqib al-ashraf* (head of the descendants from the Prophet) to complain to the governor in order to prohibit "this abhorrent sacrilege."

While the newspaper may have grudgingly accepted what it called the "mumbo-jumbo" that was chanted at popular religious festivals, it warned against the dangers such "mumbo-jumbo" might cause to the movement of commerce, as a result of believing misguided prophecies.

In 1901 the newspaper reports that a religious charlatan had claimed that if a certain group of letters is arranged in a particular pattern, they will predict the future. Sometimes this practice turned out to be harmless, but on one occasion it precipitated disaster.

Al-Ahram relates that when these letters were once affixed to the word 'cotton', "people interpreted this as to mean that the price of cotton would soar on 6 November. Merchants stopped selling their stocks in anticipation of the promised day and the peasants were forced to take out loans at usurious rates." Sadly, the prediction never came true. "As the peasants awaited the news of climbing prices, sources in America and Liverpool announced that the price of cotton would plummet drastically which caused pandemonium in the Egyptian market.

Al-Ahram reported on a new method of fortune-telling that had recently been introduced to Egypt: the reading of palms.

The newspaper's coverage of such practices was not restricted to Cairo and Alexandria. Correspondents in the countryside filed numerous reports, undoubtedly because superstition was more prevalent there due to widespread illiteracy and ignorance and the passed-down beliefs in myth and legends and folk remedies and charms. Also, disease was rampant and health care and sanitary awareness were so rudimentary that there was an enormous potential market for anyone who claimed that he could cure people's ailments, particularly those which were beyond the ken of the village barber-surgeon.

On 1 June 1901, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Al-Qurashiya reports that a lame man appeared in the village claiming that he could cure leprosy, blindness, deafness and "all internal and external disorders." The man "was warmly greeted by the villagers who granted him their utmost generosity. After having discerned where the sources of wealth lay, he exacted from them their jewels, their chickens and their bread. And even though he has yet to cure so much as a pimple on a pinkie finger, the villagers still flock to him in droves."

Charlatanism had become so widespread that Mohammed Tawfiq, an *Al-Ahram* reader, submitted to the newspaper a study in which he attempted to categorise the types of such practices as they were common in Egypt. Published under the title "Chains of illusions" on 19 September 1901, the study categorises the practitioners of the black arts into four. The first "are those who speak of the supernatural in obscure, abrupt phrases which convey several meanings so that they cannot be contradicted. You will find their necks bedecked with several strands of prayer beads from which they draw inspiration to predict people's futures. Their customers are inevitably silly women and ignorant men." A second category of clairvoyants are those who claim to be able to locate a precious item that was lost. The third type of clairvoyant described by this writer creates an effect of smoke emanating from the walls whereas in reality he has an incense burner concealed up his sleeve. Finally, there are those who "claim that they can change metals into gold. "How many simple folk have they lured into their trap, taking their money and then vanishing."

From charlatans, *Al-Ahram* turns its censure to drunkards. There had always been locally produced alcoholic beverages in Egypt and new ones were introduced by the Europeans. *Al-Ahram* condemned them both. Among the traditional forms of alcoholic drinks was *booza* for which *Al-Ahram* offered the following description: "It is a fermented substance made of barley and burnt bread that is put into a clay bowl in which all manner of filth has accumulated. This bowl is then left to ferment." Served along with the *booza* was an appetizer of "raw meat which people would pulverise between their teeth so that the blood would ooze from the corners of their mouth." The inevitable result of *booza* drinking sessions were fights in which "some would have their bones broken and others would be knocked out and decent people would flee in panic."

One *Al-Ahram* edition cited statistics of the quantities of alcoholic beverages that had been imported into Egypt in 1900. The list included 13 million litres of wine which included 304,000 bottles worth a total of LE1,400,000; 100,000 barrels and 122,000 bottles of beer worth in total LE1,400,000; 850,000km of pure alcohol and 480,000km of alcohol blended with other drinks.

Also, according to this article, the number of pubs and bars had come to exceed the number of private homes.

What this author did not take stock of, however, was that most of the pub owners, not to mention a large part of their clientele, were foreigners who enjoyed the immunities granted under the capitulation. The police were powerless to control them.

Not that Egyptians did not imbibe their share of the enormous quantities of alcohol that were produced locally or imported into the country. Indeed, it was a concern that provoked discussion of the notion of "civilised" behaviour which to some meant imitating the worst of European customs. *Al-Ahram* deplored the concept of civilised behaviour taken up by some children of wealthy families who blindly embraced Western customs.

Some Egyptians went to such extremes in aping European customs that they revived in Egypt a custom that had almost died out in Europe: the duel. This caused concern among some writers. It was the opinion of *Al-Ahram* that there were numerous moral impediments to the spread of this custom in Egypt. Firstly, it was inherently unjust because it could arbitrarily lead to the death of the righteous party; secondly, it was against the law; and, thirdly, it was in blatant contravention to the injunctions against killing in the three divinely revealed religions.

The spread of such notions of urbanity also reached the children from the new classes of landed gentry, village mayors and elders in the countryside. Whiskey, one correspondent notes, has become a staple of the dinner table in some homes whereas it would be more advisable to spend the money that is wasted on drink "on building a school or other such project that will bring benefit to the nation." The newspaper also deplores the custom of "the sons of this class, who, as soon as they have sold their crops, head directly toward the city in search of amusement and all attendant forms of debauchery."

Another new urban fashion observed by *Al-Ahram* was particularly offensive to women's modesty. "As they walk down the street, women are exposed to the foul and coarse language of the *effendi* sitting in the café, the ignorant youth and the elderly man. The men believe that this ogling, jesting and foul-mouthing are signs of masculinity." The newspaper appeals to the governor to punish these offenders for violating public decency.

Frequently, to counter the effect of the spread of such mores, the newspapers, and notably *Al-Ahram*, took it upon themselves to highlight models of worthy behaviour. On one occasion it praised the last will and testimony of a sheikh who enjoined the members of his family to strictly observe religious injunctions and not to "squander money on displays of pomp and presumption."

Finally, *Al-Ahram* adopted the appeal for moderation as the ideal path to social stability. According to Daoud Barakat, a writer for the newspaper, "Man by his very nature is moderate in his mode of life, yet once he allows for waste and hedonism he has opened the door to the gradual encroachment of corruption. In both Britain and America, temperance societies have been founded. Every member must pledge never to drink alcohol and never to eat and drink anything, no matter how nutritious, other than in moderate quantities."

We have no indication of how this appeal, appearing in *Al-Ahram* in September 1902, went down among the newspaper's readers of the day. We do know, however, that it still has validity today.

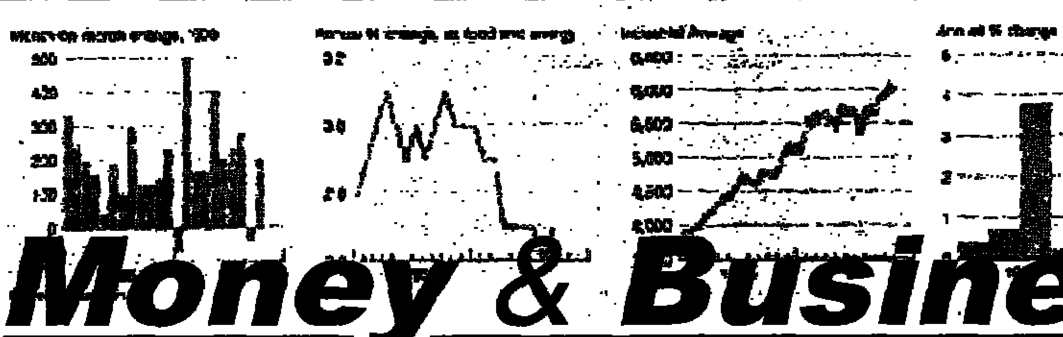


The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Korean delegation in Egypt

A DELEGATION from the Korean National Assembly, headed by the chairman of the Korean Trade, Industry and Energy Committee, is currently on a 5-day visit to Egypt.

The Korean delegation has so far met with People's Assembly Speaker Dr. Ahmed Fathi Sorour, and the Minister of Public Enterprises Sector Atef Obeid. In the delegation's meeting with Sorour, views of mutual concern were exchanged, including ways of strengthening Korean-Egyptian relations through parliamentary cooperation.



German economic team to visit

A HIGH-powered economic delegation representing the German state of Bavaria arrived in Egypt on Thursday for a three-day visit, during which they will discuss ways of enhancing bilateral trade and economic relations before meeting with a number of Egyptian businessmen.

The visit is aimed at encouraging small and medium-scale companies to invest in Egypt and find out more about investment opportunities in Toshki and new urban and industrial cities, said a German official. Means of increasing tourism between the two countries will also be discussed.

Egyptian products exhibition in Chicago

AMERICAN news agencies and newspapers have reported that the first Egyptian products exhibition will be held in Chicago, in the wake of the recent visit of President Mubarak, where he met with business leaders and the media.

The *Chicago Tribune* remarked that the Egyptian exhibition comes within the framework of Egypt's recent efforts at rapidly increasing national production and development, both of which have made considerable strides over the past few years, especially in industry and commerce.

President Mubarak's visit to Chicago not only confirmed the choice of the city as the site of the exhibition, but also ensured the chances of the exhibition's success of attracting US investment in Egypt and strengthening US-Egyptian cooperation in a variety of fields.

The US Chamber of Commerce in Egypt will convene a meeting on the sidelines of the exhibition, which will be attended by leading figures in business and commerce from both Egypt and the United States, to discuss prospects for investment in Egypt. The meeting is scheduled for 25 June, one day prior to the opening of the exhibition, which will take place from 26 June - 6 July 1997. Both the meeting and the exhibition are expected to receive extensive media coverage.

Major companies having potential for high production and export are aware of the necessity of giving an honest portrayal of Egyptian production and how it has developed over the years. This will aid in increasing exports to the United States, considered one of the largest markets in the world for all kinds of goods. Egypt is also a beneficiary of the United States' GSP programme, under which some 4,000 products are exempt from customs duties.

It is a known fact that Chicago is considered one of the most important financial and commercial centres in the US. For this reason, a high-level delegation headed by Dr Ahmed Goweili, minister of trade and commerce, will travel to Chicago to meet with the US Chamber of Commerce to discuss investment opportunities in Egypt and explore the means by which bilateral economic ties can be further enhanced. Increasing economic ties between the two countries comes at a time when political ties are also being strengthened.

Hans Affi, chairman of the board of Propaganda International, the organisers of the exhibition, said that this will be an important economic event for Egypt. Preparations have been going on for more than a year and a half, with cooperation from major American marketing companies. The exhibition will take place at Navy Pier, one of the largest exhibition grounds in the US, and will take place at a time when tourism to Chicago is at its peak and marketing conditions are favourable.

Malik Akif, deputy-board chairman of the company, stated that extra care has been taken to market and present Egypt in the best light possible, and to make the public aware of Egypt's past and present history.

Fouad Akif, general manager of the company, explained that an agreement was made with the mayor of Chicago to lengthen the time of the exhibition to 11 days, giving the public ample opportunity to purchase goods directly from vendors, as well as giving potential importers the chance to see for themselves the high quality of Egyptian products and goods.

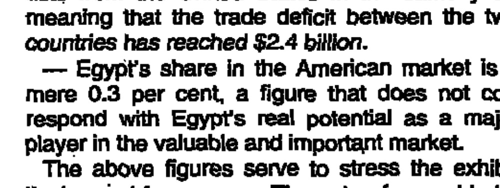
All participants, whether from the government or the private sector, must exert their best efforts for the sake of reducing the trade deficit between Egypt and the US. A quick glance at figures from the Commercial Representative Office shows the following:

— Total exports to the United States in 1995 totalled $606 million, of which $175 million consisted of petroleum products, while $431 million was made up of non-petroleum products.

— Egypt imported $2,985 million worth of products from the United States in the same year, meaning that the trade deficit between the two countries has reached $2.4 billion.

— Egypt's share in the American market is a mere 0.3 per cent, a figure that does not correspond with Egypt's real potential as a major player in the valuable and important market.

The above figures serve to stress the exhibition's need for success. Through a favourable investment climate made possible via cooperation with the Egyptian government and the private sector, Egypt Expo '97 seems likely to attract American investors who want to know the great potential Egypt has for investment.



Boosting the economy through competition

MAMDOUH Thabit Mekki, under-secretary of the Egyptian Federation of Industries and board member of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce said that the Egyptian economy, during the forthcoming period, will realise a growth rate three times that of the population growth rate. He indicated that the private sector will be playing a major role in economic development through its participation in large-scale production projects.

Mekki pointed out that businessmen's organisations such as the Cairo Chamber of Commerce, the Egyptian Federation of Industries and the Egyptian Businessmen's Association, play an important role in the nation's economic development in a variety of fields.

Mekki said that providing a competitive climate will bring about an increase in private sector investment, especially by removing obstacles and passing legislation particular to increasing the role of the private sector in increasing overall local production.

Turning his comments towards the Egyptian banking sector, Mekki said that it can play a positive role in financing different economic fields, contributing and encouraging economic investment and development. He explained that banks have expanded over the last year, complying with the increased demand for credit from the private sector in implementing projects, in addition to sharing in financing the purchase of shares and securities and the capital market.

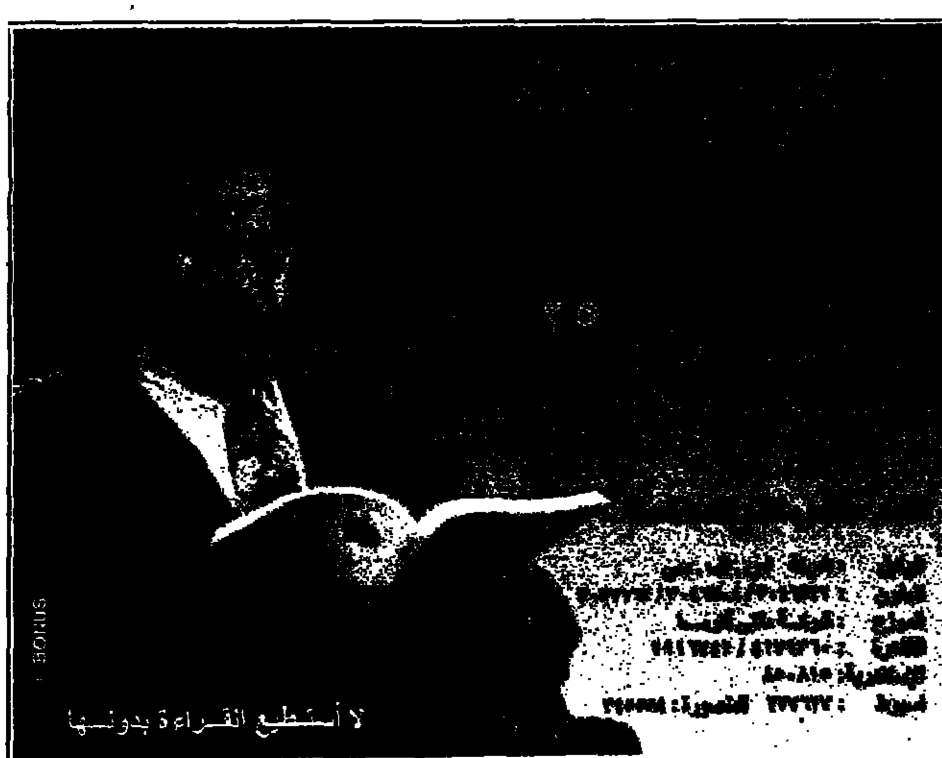
As for the subject of employment and unemployment, Mekki said that there is no other means to combat the problem except through the creation of large-scale projects such as those in the Gulf of Suez Upper Egypt.

Faisal Bank's investments reach LE6.1 billion

Figures from 1993 until the third quarter of 1997

THE VOLUME of Faisal Islamic Bank's transactions for the third quarter of the current fiscal year indicate an upward trend in the performance of the bank. This increase, which included deposits and investment portfolios, resulted in achieving a surplus of 43 per cent over the year 1993.

Indicators	June 1993	June 1994	May 1995	May 1996	Growth rate (per cent)	Until 8/2/1997 (LE mn)
Total assets	5461	5615	6227	6425	17.70	6876
Deposits	4333	4511	4933	5101	17.70	5120
Bank's revenues	441	451	508	583	32.20	609 (nine months only)
Investment balance	4752	5042	5665	5826	23.30	6137
Total revenues	261	251	350	368	41.00	300 (nine months only)
Surplus	222	211	304	318	43.22	262 (nine months only)
Return for investment accounts	199	201	246	275	38.20	222 (nine months only)



Al-Ahram Weekly

Netanyahu's dead-end road

Following the Arab League's decision this week to freeze efforts to normalise relations with Israel, the US finally discovered the ability to condemn someone. The Arab world, argued the Clinton administration, cannot "downgrade their relationship with Israel" whenever problems emerge. Rather, they need to "be serious about peace with Israel."

These statements on the part of the US are particularly poignant in light of the fact that it has vetoed two Security Council resolutions condemning Israel for its decision to go ahead with settlement construction in Jebel Abu Ghneim. Had the US, or Israel, for that matter, been serious about peace, neither the recent clashes and bombings, nor the Arab League decision would have materialised. In short, peace is a two way street and Netanyahu is hell-bent on driving on the wrong side of the road.

The Israeli premier is, of course, unperturbed. Why worry about condemnation when he is sure that the US will, if not support him, then at least not stand in his way — even if that road leads to a dead-end for peace.

What the US and Israel either fail to understand, or simply choose to ignore, is that the blame rests solely on Netanyahu's shoulders. From the first day he assumed office last year until now, the Israeli prime minister has not taken a single, decisive step towards the realisation of peace along the terms dictated by Oslo, save for a token redeployment of troops. Meanwhile, the Arabs have repeatedly and unequivocally stood firm on the side of peace, warning of the dire consequences that may result if such hedonistic, self-serving policies are not renounced. The Arab League's decision, as such, is simply the logical and inevitable step that had to be taken, although it was not one the Arabs in any way long-coveted or desired. It is, in no uncertain terms, a wake-up call for Netanyahu.

The framework for peace has already been laid down and any setbacks realised to date may be reversed, but only if the prejudicial condemnations cease and the business of hammering out a lasting and comprehensive peace begins.

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Closing the ranks

The resolution issued by Arab foreign ministers to freeze normalisation unless the Israeli government changes its attitude is proof that Arab differences have been mended, writes Ibrahim Nafie

We are all too familiar with the way Netanyahu and his extremist government distort the truth. The typical knee-jerk Israeli response is to cast all the blame on the Arabs and other international parties, especially Egypt, although the peace process is in its current abyss as a result of the hostile policies of the Israeli government.

From the moment he became prime minister, Netanyahu has inexorably chipped away at the entire edifice of the peace process with his irresponsible statements, generating a climate marked by enormous tension and charged with the possibility of renewed violence and warfare. His policies, particularly his recent approval of the Jebel Abu Ghneim project, has dealt the final blow to the essence of the peace process. This move, which completes the Israeli encirclement of Jerusalem, isolating it from the rest of the West Bank, makes the final status negotiations meaningless.

Characteristically, Netanyahu blamed the Arabs for yielding to the forces of extremism by freezing normalisation with Israel. To muddy the waters still more, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy accused the Arabs of trying to topple the Likud government and to isolate Israel internationally. He accused Egypt in particular of encouraging the anti-Israeli trend in the Arab world in spite of the peace treaty signed between Egypt and Israel.

Of course, Netanyahu and his government are as innocent as the wolf was for the blood on Joseph's coat.

Yet the Arab position could not be more clear or straightforward. The resolutions adopted by the Ministerial Council of the Arab League emanate from the same, internationally recognised, principles and conventions which Israel violates with such impunity. Meanwhile, the Israeli government acts as though it can reinvent all the rules and procedures for international negotiations. It pretends that negotiations are conducted between political parties, rather than states; that when a new party comes to power, previous agreements are null and void. Nothing could demonstrate this attitude more clearly than Israel's continual closures of Palestinian areas, the obstacles it creates in order to prevent Palestinian refugees from returning to their homes, its stubborn refusal to construct a safe corridor between Gaza and the West Bank, its refusal to open the Gaza airport, the renewed confiscation of Palestinian land, the on-going construction of ring-roads, and its continued detention of Palestinian political prisoners. This is not to mention the settlement policy in Jerusalem, the most flagrant violation of all agreements signed with the Palestinians and in blatant contravention of all provisions of international law pertaining to areas under foreign occupation.

When the Arab governments moved to freeze relations with Israel, the peace process had already come to a halt. Indeed, this may be considered a death rattle, and the racist policies of the Netanyahu government, which acts as though it is on a divine mission to recast the region and the future of Israel itself, in accordance with its own obsolete fantasies, are responsible.

This is not the opinion of the Arab countries alone. It requires little effort to recollect that the resolution forwarded to the Security Council condemning Israel's settlement policy in Jerusalem was unanimously approved by all Security Council members with the exception of the US. Even then, however, Clinton was forced to admit to journalists that the US's veto did not imply support for Israel's settlement policy. Eventually, a resolution on the same issue and with virtually the same wording was approved by the overwhelming majority of the UN General Assembly.

The condemnation of the Israeli government is universal. Netanyahu has always used peace as a weapon to serve his expansionist aims and his crude ideological vision. Netanyahu's problem, however, is that he believes that the Arabs are either totally gullible, or that they are so weak that they have no choice but to obey Israeli orders. But the Arabs have had sufficient experience with imperialism to enable them to deal with neo-colonialists and fascists whose ambition is to revive 19th-century colonial attitudes at the end of the 20th century. Nor are the Arabs as debilitated as Netanyahu's racist imagination leads him to believe. A new and vigorous spirit marks inter-Arab relations now that the ruptures inflicted by the Gulf War have healed, and the Arabs are perfectly capable of putting any differences between them aside at a moment's notice if they feel that the land most sacred to Arabs, Muslims and Christians alike, is in danger. No one is prepared to believe that Jerusalem has been the capital of Israel for 3,000 years, as Netanyahu claims, not only because the state of Israel is no more than five decades old, but because the Arabs, throughout their history, have always been present in Jerusalem and never forfeited their claim to the city.

The resolutions adopted by the Ministerial Council of the Arab League, however, were not solely designed to force the Israeli government to admit its responsibility for destroying the peace process. The resolutions are also intended to support the Palestinian people and the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem in particular. This represents the second dimension of the Arab strategy.

As for Egypt, it has had to bear the brunt of Israeli acrimony due to the Israeli leadership's mistaken belief that Egypt would distance itself from its fellow Arab countries and their demands for a just and comprehensive peace. Egypt has had to remind Israel repeatedly that, by signing the Camp David Accord, it did not conclude a separate peace. Rather, this accord was part of an overall project for peace at the core of which lay the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state, with Jerusalem as its capital. Egypt has also always insisted that all the principles that govern the settlement process on the Egyptian front must be applied, in letter and spirit, on all other fronts. Egypt's actions today are in keeping with the positions it has consistently adopted.

The ball is now in the Israeli court. If Netanyahu had called a halt to the construction in Jerusalem, negotiations could have resumed on 17 March. But if Netanyahu persists in undermining every fundamental concept of the peace process, then he and his government alone will stand accused of having destroyed any hope for peace, stability and prosperity.

A peculiar veto

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the significance of Washington's use of its veto power to defeat a Security Council resolution denouncing Israel's construction of a controversial settlement that everybody disapproved of, including the US

The Clinton administration has twice resorted to its veto power to block a Security Council resolution condemning the construction of 6,500 Jewish housing units on Jebel Abu Ghneim in Arab East Jerusalem. Paradoxically, it has at the same time announced that it does not approve of the establishment of Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem as long as the city's final status has not been settled. There is a basic inconsistency here that bears looking into more closely and that cannot be explained away simply in terms of Washington's well-known bias towards Israel. The Americans tried to justify their use of the veto by arguing that the issue should be decided only by the negotiating parties themselves, that is, by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and also, of course, by the US as the sponsor of the Middle East peace process.

Strangely enough, the Arab parties did not bother to challenge the American argument as though its logic was self-evident and that whatever the Israelis and Palestinians agree upon supersedes any third party intervention or resolutions previously adopted by the UN General Assembly or even the Security Council on the matter. Actually the American position is not compatible with the guidelines laid down at the Madrid conference. The current Middle East peace process was launched under the sponsorship of two states, the US and the Soviet Union, and with the participation of Europe and the United Nations. Following the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the United States is striving to marginalise all other international parties to become the exclusive sponsor of the entire process. True, the European Union is trying to restore a role for itself, but its efforts have so far remained limited, and though it presents itself as complementary to and not competitive with Washington, it is welcomed by neither the US nor Israel.

Washington's departure from the Madrid framework has encouraged Netanyahu to flout the rules in his turn. Since coming to power, the Likud leader has openly declared that he does not consider himself bound by the Oslo Accords or by the land-for-peace formula. He has also proposed reducing the time-frame for the final phase of the negotiations to six months, less in the aim of accelerating the negotiations than of scrapping many of the provisions of the Oslo agreements.

A few days ago, the Islamic conference in Islamabad passed a unanimous resolution condemning the Har Homa settlement. More recently, the Jerusalem Committee in Morocco, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League recommended freezing the normalisation of relations with Israel. But with the American veto effectively stripping the Security Council of any binding power, none of the resolutions condemning Israel's act could deter Netanyahu from pushing ahead with the construction of the settlement.

Thanks to the American veto, Netanyahu got away with violating a United Nations resolution that was reconfirmed in the Oslo Accords, which stipulates that all parties must refrain from introducing any changes in Jerusalem pending an agreement on the final status of the holy city. By using its veto, the US administration deprived the international community of the ability to force Israel to pull back. This placed it before the responsibility, as broker of the peace process, to undertake that task itself. But after a visit of less than 48 hours to the region, its Middle East envoy Dennis Ross admitted failure and returned home. Thus a concrete action, the US veto, protected Israel, while a counter-action in defence of Arab rights did not materialise, encouraging extremists on both sides of the confrontation line. Moreover, Madeleine Albright declared that although Arafat was furnishing an effort to curb terrorism, he had not been 100 per cent successful.

In fact, the ramifications of the US veto are not only regional but global, touching on the very essence of a post-bipolar world order still in the making. With the breakdown of the Soviet superpower, it appeared for a while, particularly during the Gulf crisis, that the confrontational practice of using the veto in the Security Council had been replaced by a process of consensus. But the US has resuscitated the veto, using it to block unanimous decisions by its fellow Council members (14 to 1), first to re-elect Boutros-Ghali to a second term in office, then to condemn Israel's construction of the Har Homa settlement in Arab East Jerusalem. In a way, the veto is indicative of Washington's attempt to replace the former bipolar world order by an American-led unipolar order instead of allowing a more democratic multipolar order to take shape. All opponents of a unipolar world order — and they are many — are potential allies of the Arabs in their struggle against the dictates of an American-Israeli condominium in the Middle East.

But without a minimum degree of Arab unity this potential opportunity is unlikely to materialise. The present Arab inability to convene an Arab summit seems to betray the fact that inter-Arab relations are still determined more by the fallout from the Gulf War than by the present deterioration in the Arab-Israeli peace process. One can understand that in the eyes of many Arab states Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait made him appear a more immediate threat than Israel which, under its Labour government, seemed to be moving forward in the direction of peace. But can any Arab party today regard Saddam as a more immediate threat than Netanyahu?

Cloning, not creation

By Naguib Mahfouz



I am against those who wish to ban cloning, not only in Egypt, but in the developed nations as well, for knowledge should never be treated in that manner. We must not be afraid of negative fallout from a discovery; in fact, our duty is to give scientists complete freedom of action in experimentation and discovery. This should not worry us: if experiments are permissible with the plants created by God, then why should it not be permissible in animals and humans? The result need not be limited to the duplication of a human; in theory, a clone could be free of the subject's faults and blemishes, which is a genetic advance not to be ignored, and is neither blasphemous nor irreverent.

To those who claim that creation is an attribute of God and God alone, I reply: justice, mercy and generosity are also attributes of God. Should that stop people from being just, merciful or generous? These attributes in God are one thing, in man another.

Besides, there is absolutely no creation concerned in cloning, since it is merely a matter of fertilising an ovum that already has specific characteristics. The ovum is then placed in the uterus of a woman and becomes an embryo (or foetus) in the normal manner. The whole operation, then, is close to artificial insemination (which is practised world-wide, and is not at all an attempt at creation) — but may also be an attempt to control the genetic attributes of embryos to produce improved progeny — in the same manner as standard cross-breeding, but in an improved form.

I fail to see how this could constitute a transgression of religion: God created humans with the divine knowledge that the boundaries of their discoveries could encompass cloning; the scientist involved in cloning was himself made by God, who is aware that His creations are capable of scientific creativity.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Battle for Jerusalem

Al-Shaab: "Jerusalem has become a sensitive barometer to gauge our present situation, our temperature, our humanity and even our ability to survive. Before its walls, patriots and traitors will be separated. The battle for Jerusalem has commenced and will not end except with the defeat of one of the parties. The rulers of Egypt and the Arabs should determine their positions. Will they be inside the walls to support Zionist hegemony or outside them to participate in the liberation of Jerusalem?"
(Magdi Ahmed Hussein, 25 March)

Al-Mussawar: "Binyamin Netanyahu wants the Arabs and Palestinians to fall in with his impossible programme. He is prepared to negotiate for a thousand years provided he can enforce his will through a series of faits accomplis and Arab reaction is confined to polite condemnation and verbal rejection. Anything more would be anti-Semitic! As for angry demonstrations, throwing stones and confronting the crimes of the occupation, these [in his view] should never be countenanced for they are acts of violence which encourage terrorism!"
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 28 March)

Al-Gomhuria: "With the convening of the Jerusalem Committee, there is now a greater possibility of an Arab summit being held. Such a summit would support the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle and halt the Judaisation of Jerusalem. The responsibility of the Islamic world would be to present the case of the Palestinians to the world and confront any US veto standing in the way of international support for legitimacy. The Islamic world has proven its worth by helping to bring peace to Bosnia and now it can do it again by confronting the flood of lies and distortions emanating from Israel."
(Editorial, 28 March)

Al-Ahram: "The question before the Arab League in the wake of the Islamic and Jerusalem Committee meetings is whether all the statements of condemnation can be turned into practical measures to force Israel to stop building settlements, grabbing land and to start the final phase of negotiations on Jerusalem before it is completely Judaised and the Arabs are forced to look for a new Jerusalem!"
(Editorial, 29 March)

Akhbar El-Yom: "We are delighted with the strong resolutions issued by the Jerusalem Committee. They highlight the new unified Arab-Islamic position. The most important resolution is the one urging Islamic nations to review their links with Israel until Israel heeds UN resolutions and upholds peace agreements based on the Madrid conference and the Oslo Accords. This resolution has angered the Israelis but pleased all Arabs."
(Ibrahim Saeda, 29 March)

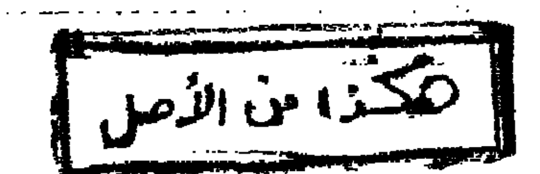
Al-Ahram: "Despite our opposition to Yasser Arafat's policies since the secret Oslo Accords with Israel, we would like to reiterate that Arafat's patience is about to run out. Those who know Arafat well, and I am one of them, can vouch that Arafat will never sell his honour, his national pride or the rights of his people for a few deceitful pledges to give him a piece of land to govern. This is something which is rejected by Arafat, his organisation and the people he has led through the hardest of times."
(Ihsan Bakr, 30 March)

Al-Arabi: "The question is: Who will strike at Israel? And what are the dangers of the slow-down in arming the Arab countries and Israel's haste in signing peace agreements with its neighbours? What Israel is bracing itself for is the threat of the long-range missiles that would be launched in an all-out war. This is what Israel is preparing for. Its intelligence and expectations about weapons systems in the region lead it to believe that peace is uncertain and war is a possibility. Some countries can launch an attack — Syria, Iraq and even Egypt, if peace breaks down, or Iran if the war spreads. The weapons we possess are an important factor in the battle raging over Jerusalem. We should discard all illusions about a false peace."
(Mahmoud El-Maraghy, 31 March)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



I saw the face of Esmat Abdel-Meguid, secretary-general of the League of Arab States, on numerous occasions when he was the Egyptian ambassador in Paris, and I always think of him as exuding optimism and *joie de vivre*. My first instinct was to draw his smile from those days of celebration. But then, on second thought, I found myself drawing a frown, as if the current crisis facing peace was reflected in the contradictory lines of his features. His eyes are curious and questioning, his lips are firmly shut, and the contours are caught up in a circular eddy, echoing the whirlpool of events. Whenever I draw Abdel-Meguid's portrait, I remember Mahmoud Fawzi, the veteran Egyptian politician. Traces of Fawzi's features surface in this depiction: the rounded cheeks, the lips, chin and forehead.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Lights out

The urgent question facing Washington and Israel, as well as the Palestinians, is not the crisis facing the peace process but about who triggered the most recent violence in the region.

Leah Rabin, the widow of Yitzhak Rabin, blamed the Likud Party and its leaders — including Netanyahu — for instigating the assassination of Rabin in order to derail the peace negotiations with the Palestinians. Nothing much has changed since then. Ten months in power have been sufficient for Netanyahu and his government of right-wing religious extremists to achieve their objective: torpedoing the peace process and destroying Arafat's confidence in American promises to further the peace process. President Mubarak called for Netanyahu's resignation because he seemed incapable of honouring agreements already signed. In addition, Mubarak convinced the Arab states to slow normalisation with Israel, freeze multilateral negotiations and return to the boycott of Israeli goods.

Not a week passes without Netanyahu creating a new crisis, issuing some decree violating the Palestinians' rights, reneging on a few more of his international obligations, and creating more tensions with Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority or Egypt. He is always ready to mobilise the Israeli Defence Forces, seal off Gaza and the West Bank, declare a state of emergency, or threaten to reoccupy territory and expel Arafat from Gaza.

Nobody can blame Bibi: his arrogance and aggressivity are encouraged and backed by the US. America protected him when he dragged his feet on the Hebron agreement; it helped him renegotiate the terms and schedule for the redeployment of Israeli forces from the West Bank towns. The US condoned repeated violations of agreements and the expansion of settlements, and used the veto when informal threats failed. When Bibi went a step further and ordered the construction of a settlement on Jebel Abu Ghneim and his minister of interior proclaimed that the fight for Jerusalem had begun — in other words, that the city would no longer be the subject of further negotiations — America used its veto for the second time. Then the situation exploded and a young man blew himself up in Tel Aviv.



America allowed Netanyahu to extricate himself from agreements already concluded in spirit and form, leading to the collapse of the peace process, the freezing of relations and the suspension of normalisation. When violence breaks out as a result of Palestinian protests, the issue, according to Israel and the US, is not that Israel has violated its agreements, but that Arafat and the Palestinian police are incapable of controlling the population. The US government sends Dennis Ross to unearth the causes of the problem, and Washington denies any responsibility. Ross's survey culminates in the approval of Israel's demands, and Arafat is instructed to turn off the green light and turn on the red — notwithstanding that all the light switches are in Washington and Tel Aviv.

When the Israeli prime minister decided to alter the clauses of the Hebron agreement signed by Peres, Israel and the US obliged Arafat to make numerous concessions, beginning with Israel's decision to withdraw its troops from only two per cent of the territory in the first phase, instead of the agreed-upon 30 per cent, and its insistence that total redeployment would only take place on 50 per cent of occupied territory.

Strangely enough, Bibi is the one refusing to resume negotiations and is demanding that Arafat help him arrest 150 Palestinians opposed to the peace process. Meanwhile, the Israeli bulldozers are busy at work on the new settlement. After considerable hesitation, the Arab states decided to take a unified stand over normalisation with Israel. But this decision came at a time when Jerusalem was almost lost. The question remains: is that sufficient to save it?

Soapbox

Sticking together

The two-day Arab League meeting held this week culminated in a resolution to stop all normalisation with Israel and make the resumption of the process conditional on cessation of Jewish settlement-building in Jerusalem.

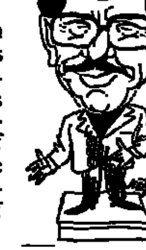
Growing Palestinian resistance has led to greater unity in the internal political arena. No longer is the Palestinian Authority's position in conflict with that of its opponents, especially Hamas.

The convergence of Palestinian views mirrors a rapprochement in the official political positions of Arab states as demonstrated at the Jerusalem Committee meeting in Rabat, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference summit in Islamabad and the Arab League's foreign ministerial meeting in Cairo.

Undoubtedly, intense resistance inside the Occupied Territories and mounting Arab pressure outside must lead to a modification in the negotiations. The picture today is very different from what it was in Madrid, when Israel managed to isolate the Palestinian track, and kept Egypt out of official negotiations.

Today, Israel and the US face a united Arab front. Arabs now demand progress toward peace on the ground and an end to Israel's settlement expansion.

Further escalation of tensions and an intensification of Arab diplomatic efforts are likely, with direct Egyptian-Syrian-Palestinian participation in negotiations with the US, Europe and, finally, an Israeli government run by Netanyahu — if he is not blown away in the storm he created by opening the tunnel beside Al-Aqsa and ordering the construction of settlements in Jebel Abu Ghneim.



This week's soapbox speaker is an expert on Palestinian affairs and a columnist with Al-Shaab *newspaper.*

Mahgoub Omar

The return of the repressed

Despite the unforgiving nature of Oslo, the present tougher Arab attitude towards the peace negotiations raised the profile of Palestinian national demands to a higher level, writes Edward Said

As the stark face of Israeli intransigence and ideological intoxication stands openly revealed for the whole world to see, the powerful mills of deception and propaganda have already begun to spread a misleading interpretation around it, transforming it into the "justified" results of Palestinian terrorism and violence.

First Netanyahu, then the usual chorus of his advisers and associates reiterate the basic theme, that there can be no peace without first putting an end to Palestinian violence and terror, since it is those that have blocked the peace process. Then the American Jewish community, courted so assiduously by the Palestinian leadership, repeats the same preposterous (in the literal sense of the word, the cause being made to come after the result) idea in enormous full-page advertisements in *The New York Times* and elsewhere, that the PLO must re-arrest the Hamas terrorists, that there must be no more "green light" given them (as there allegedly was), and that there must be reciprocity, a word first used by Netanyahu when he spoke to a joint session of Congress last July, during his first trip to the US after the Israeli elections.

Then finally the "Middle East peace process co-ordinator" (Dennis Ross) is sent to the area to restore "confidence" between the sides, with a strong hint, in my opinion virtually a certainty, that Secretary of State Albright will follow a little later, to try to re-capture matters for Bill Clinton as cheaply as possible: this means that Israel cannot, mustn't be offended. Not a single word in all this of the land seizures near Bethlehem, nor of the continued closures, the spreading and deepening poverty and frustration in the Occupied Territories, and the continual hoodwinking by the Israelis of their so-called Palestinian partners in peace. An untroubled air of high seriousness and moral purpose now hangs over a peace process in ruins, one totally unrelated to the other. The wonder is not that there is violence, but in such horrifying circumstances that there is so little of it. How long can Mr Arafat keep his own people at bay?

This time, however, there has been a more spirited, if uncoordinated Palestinian attempt at resistance. Street demonstrations, sit-ins at Jebel Abu Ghneim, a tougher attitude towards the peace negotiations have raised the profile of Palestinian national demands to a higher level; and these have been taken up by the international community generally, and the Arab world in particular. And yet one has the sinking feeling that despite all this, the room for manoeuvre is quite small, and by now pretty much exhausted. Oslo is, was, and always will be unforgiving, and what was given up there can scarcely be regained now. Hebron was a perfect demonstration of this. One of the main problems now, I think, is Palestinian and Arab dependence not so much on the United States, but on internalised expectations of what the US would like us to be doing. A perfect exemplification of this was King Hussein's inexplicably peculiar behaviour. First, he makes public a strong personal letter of dissatisfaction and even denunciation that he sent to Netanyahu. Then a few days later, when one of his soldiers runs amuck and unconscionably kills a group of Israeli schoolgirls, the monarch immediately flies to Israel, abases himself before the aggrieved families, and becomes an object supplicant for Israeli, and then of course, American "understanding."

No head of state has ever done this sort of thing, and certainly no Israeli personality has apologised for "mistakes", tragic or otherwise, when Arab civilians were massacred. Last spring, after the circumstances of the Qana exterminations were made public, the Israelis — far from apologising or visiting bereaved families — tried to brazen it out by laying the blame on the "terrorist" Hizbullah fighters. this was then amplified in the US when *New York Times* journalist and "expert" Judith Miller actually said on CNN that "those people" were really from Baalbek and were cynically put in Qana for sacrifice by Hizbullah. For his pains in publishing the UN Report that clearly blamed the Israelis for what had happened, Boutros Ghali was later to lose his job thanks exclusively to US and Israeli opposition to his candidacy.

Arab leaders now feel it to be their role to be moderate and increase Israeli confidence in their intentions because this is what the US has finally impressed on them as their principal policy obligation. Israeli insecurities and fears are the top agenda item, even though Israel pursues the most unlawfully aggressive policies on the ground without consideration for Arab insecurities or treaty obligations. We are now back in time to the 1980's when legions of State Department and American academic experts decided that, as an influential article by one of them put it, foreign policy ought to be conducted according to Freud. In other words, the official idea was to bring Arabs and Israelis together for secret sessions as a way of dramatising the psychological differences between them, the better thus to be able to resolve them.

I remember thinking at the time that we were being asked to believe that the rape of Palestine in 1948, the colonisation of the West Bank and Gaza, the continuous repression and oppression of Palestinians by Israel were all the result of a psychological misunderstanding between us, and if we spent enough time listening to each other we could get beyond that more or less trivial impasse. Of course what was really happening was a form of psychological warfare that ended up with the PLO outstripping all expectations, and being more than reasonably concessive in Oslo. Psychological capitulation was the goal, and it is clear now that it is still the goal.

I am convinced that the Palestinian (if not all the Arab) leadership are totally persuaded that they have no option but to accept American and Israeli diktats. Thus Mr Arafat seemed satisfied that he had gained a concession for the land seizures and the "final" colony at Har Homa when the Israelis allowed him to land and take off from Gaza airport (with permission given only to him). To stay in power, he reasoned, you must stay in the game, and the game requires that you accept such indignities and try to pretend that they are really victories. Whether the great mass of Palestinians who are suffering under work and food shortages, the absence of hope and the tyrannies of his regime, will continue to accept this state of affairs is something else again. Certainly neither he nor his lieutenants have shown much inclination to pay much attention to what people think — consider, for instance, the appalling fate of almost 400,000 Palestinians in Lebanon who have been cast off as so much detritus — so there is no reason to expect much change there.

Yet it is also clear from what is happening throughout the Arab and Islamic world that there is little acceptance of what Israel, the US, and the Arab leaders have been doing vis-à-vis Israel.

This peace has no basis in Arab societies, and for good reason. It is correctly seen as imposed on a weak and disorganised Arab state system by powerful interests which represent a narrow segment of the population. In the long run, and despite the tables being turned now, the contest is a very protracted one, which Israel has failed to win. Yes, it has the military force and the backing of the US, and yes, it is a modern state undergirded by modern institutions and, for Jews, a democratic if highly militarised society. But can it impose its will on the entire Arab and Islamic world by becoming a "normal" neighbour, as it tried so hard to do by both military and cultural means?

No, and the chances are that its arrogant, short-sighted behaviour will forever deny it the kind of integration in the area that it claims to want. This is neither the result of a misunderstanding nor of a lack of confidence in Arab intentions. What happened in 1948 was a real history, a real conquest, a real dispossession of an entire people. Until that is acknowledged, there can be no peace, even though the current Arab leadership have decided to forget the past in their haste to mollify America and Israel. And when what is repressed finally does return, it will demand a reckoning that we cannot at this time foresee, except insofar as it will ineradicably alter the existing order.

Sancho Panza's lonely life

In this second instalment of an article begun last week, Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri explains why cloning post-modernists is not a problem — in fact, they're the perfect candidates

As a professor of literature, I have always been fascinated by the predominance of the mythic and ironic modes in modernist literature and arts. Probably perceptions of secularisation and modernisation as a gradual process of desanctification and the recession of the transcendental account for this phenomenon. The mythic in modernist literature is a search for a *logos* and *telos* within nature, inside history, in the context of a metaphysics of immanence. It is an expression of man's yearning for transcendence within the limits of the discourse of desanctification and deconstruction. The literary expression of this attempt is "natural supernaturalism", while the ironic is an expression of the hopelessness of the quest. The ironist is a man who still has memories of the heroic age of modernity, but who knows it was a vain dream. Irony is his protest; modernist literature is largely the sad elegy of modernity. When irony gives place to the more fragmented collage, we know we are in post-modernist territory, where flux is everything, where alienation and anomie have been normalised. No elegies are written because we no longer have memories of the heroic dream of transcendence. Reality is atomised and human history is fragmented into small narratives of no universal significance.

A similar pattern could be traced in the development of some of the basic images of the hero in modern Western civilisation. The first hero of Western modernity is Prometheus, who steals the fire (knowledge and domination of nature) from the gods and gives it to man. In that sense, the myth of Prometheus is not unlike the Biblical account of the fall of man, where eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge leads to the expulsion from Paradise. But the Promethean Satan, far from being condemned, is actually glorified.

The themes of conflict, knowledge as power, the light of reason replacing revelation (the central theme the Enlightenment), and the limitless, autonomous self are all present in this image. This unity begins to disintegrate with the image of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Fact is seen as sterile and arid when divorced from value. Material reality, the only level that Sancho Panza perceives, is seen as half-human when divorced from the world of ideals, the only level that Don Quixote knows.

With the image of Dr Faustus, the doubt and scepticism manifest themselves more conspicuously. Faustus, a Promethean figure who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for full knowledge, discovers, only too late, the futility and monstrosity of his imperialist quest. Frankenstein is one of the first fruits of scientific engineering; he kick-starts his career by destroying his creator. He is a modern Prometheus (as the subtitle of Mary Shelley's novel indicates). He is followed by Dracula, a vampire who feeds on blood and has to live in the dark. The Don Quixote-Sancho Panza antithesis resurfaces in Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, where the scientific imperialist quest results in a dehumanising dualism. The ball of fire stolen from the gods, the source of so much jubilation, is now seen as the source of fear and doubt.

But fear is normalised, and doubt silenced, for in the age of post-modernism, given the absence of norms, there is no basis for anger, fear or doubt. Our memory of the past is erased completely. We are the Sancho Panza who never met Don Quixote. The world is viewed neither as a machine nor an organism; it is simply a game, a collage. In lieu of Michaelangelo, we have Michael Jackson; instead of the Renaissance nudes we have porn queens and Madonna. Natural men and women strut on the stage of life with very little knowledge of good and evil, without the ability to distinguish between bridges and gas chambers. Genes and environment account for everything. So why not photocopy human beings? Aren't they already flat, manageable, one-dimensional and neutral?

Weber predicted that value-free rationalisation would lead to the domestication of man, society becoming very similar to a workshop. This is a powerful image indeed, but it nevertheless requires some modification, for what emerged was something more composite, a triadic rhythm of production-consumption-pleasure; next to the workshop we have the shopping mall and the night-club (or any variations thereon: the tourist agency or the massage parlour would do just as well). Natural men and women are bombarded with images that seduce them in the belief that life is made up of a highly reductive rhythm, that society is populated with one-dimensional men and women who move voluntarily and happily from one-dimensional workshop to supermarket to tourist agency, which promise them a one-dimensional earthly paradise.

This is the promise of value-free modernity: a technological utopia, a value-free paradise, where everything is planned and measured, all things are instrumentalised, and human beings are so rationalised, naturalised, and routinised, that their conduct is both amoral and predictable, down to the most minute detail. Such beings, having no human essence, can be readily cloned. If any unnatural irregularity emerges, they can always consult the experts, the technocrats, and the psychiatrists, namely the priests of the value-free utopia who can fix them up. Weber, in a moment of tragic perception, described this state of affairs as an "iron cage"; run by "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart, this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilisation never before achieved."

The writer is professor emeritus of literature at Ain Shams University.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Whose land?

I am always amazed at the totally un-selfconscious way in which the Western media refers to Israel as "the Jewish state". The reference is made as a matter of course, most often used stylistically in second reference, the writer blissfully unaware that he or she is making an ideological, indeed a racist, statement. Land Day, 30 March, which this year happened to fall on Easter Sunday, is an annual reminder that some 20 per cent of the population of the so-called Jewish state are non-Jewish Palestinian Arabs. Yet, even when this fact hits them in the face, Western media people remain completely immune to its significance.

Thus Reuter, reporting on Land Day commemorations this week, can unabashedly note, in passing, that "some 850,000 Arabs live in the Jewish state." Interestingly, the writer — as if unconsciously recognising the contradiction in terms — could not bring him/herself to use the word "citizens", which is what they are, at least nominally. After all, the Egyptian Embassy staff, and apparently some 15,000 Egyptian migrant workers, "live" in Israel, and that is not quite the same thing.

That these 850,000-odd individuals happen to be Palestinians and, more specifically, those among the original people of Palestine who remained within Israel's pre-'67 borders, is of course one fact that is best left hidden under the deliberately vague term "Arabs".

And while the term "Arab Israelis", which Israel uses to describe its Palestinian citizens, could in fact be an apt description of more than half of Israeli society, namely Arab Jews, the very tangible existence of Israel's Palestinian population is a constant reminder of the original sin of Palestinian dispossession, one that is reproduced not only through further occupations, annexations and dispossessions, the latest of which is in Jebel Abu Ghneim, but in the heart of Israel itself, in the flagrant racism inherent in a "Jewish state" of a little over four million including close to a million non-Jewish Palestinian Arabs.

In an interview published in this issue of the *Weekly*, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mustafa Mashhour, declares that, in an "Islamic state", Egypt's Copts would have to pay *jizia*, a special tax imposed on non-Muslims, but would, in return, be "exempt" from military service — their loyalty to the state being suspect. Whichever way you look at it, this is a despicable statement. But what Mashhour plans for Egyptian Arab Copts is exactly what Israeli "democracy" has been doing to its Muslim and Christian Palestinian Arabs for the past 49 years.

Land Day, which commemorates the killing, 17 years ago, of seven Israeli "citizens", not by Palestinian "terrorists", but by Israeli troops, is loaded with meaning. The killings were committed because Israeli Palestinians protested the confiscation of their land — "Israel does not build for Arabs", an official reminded Netanyahu a couple of weeks ago, as the Likud premier unashamedly lied about his alleged plans to build an equal number of houses for Arabs as for Jews in Har Homa. Not only does Israel *not* build for Arabs, even if they are citizens, it also confiscates their land. Not all Israeli blood sends the country's leaders, generals and armed forces into a frenzy of vengeance and collective punishment — only "Jewish blood".

And the frenzy goes on. Abdallah Khalil Sarawi, a 20-year-old Bir Zeit University student, was killed when a live bullet ripped through his chest this week. According to eye witness reports, the Israeli soldiers started firing live bullets, instead of rubber ones, when one of their number was lightly injured by a stone thrown by Palestinian protesters. In Surif, the home village of the Tel Aviv café suicide bomber, there seem to be no limits to the Nazi nature of Israeli "democracy". A 24-hour curfew is imposed on the village's 5,000 residents, who as a result are reportedly suffering from severe shortages of food and other supplies. Israeli soldiers roam the streets, taunting the inhabitants through a loudspeaker: "Come outside, you sons of bitches, if you are really men, and throw stones at us." Israeli soldiers broke into homes, destroyed furniture, beat residents, and on Land/Easter Day, two entered a woman's home, and one of them raped her. The Israeli army later confirmed that "indecent acts" had taken place. The house of Musa Ghanimat, the suicide bomber, is demolished, his 21-year-old wife is interrogated and humiliated, and her four children, aged between one and a half and eight, are made homeless.

Zionism is racism, irrespective of UN General Assembly resolutions establishing or denying the fact. Solve that problem and you've solved the Arab-Israeli conflict. Anything less is nothing but lies.

Rest in the nest

Brahms dead or alive, **David Blake** finds he keeps the spirits up

Cairo Symphony Orchestra: Brahms VIII, concerto No 2 in B flat major: Soloist piano Susanne Grutzmann; Conductor Ahmed El-Saedi: Beethoven Symphony No 3 E flat major op 55 (Eroica); Conductor Ahmed El-Saedi; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House, 29 March

Brahms one hundred years dead? Impossible. Unnerving. Nearly all the great indestructibles of music are dead. Accepted — they never die, just go on forever, popping in and out of our lives.

But Brahms dead seems unacceptable. Why? Because Holy Joe can never die — or was never alive, say his detractors. He had his enemies in high places and they had words in plenty. But dead, this commemoration concert of the second piano concerto with Susanne Grutzmann as soloist offers one more aspect of the mysterious creature from Hamburg who flew into the nineteenth century music scene, casting an aura which refuses to go away. It turns out that Wagner was the classic, and he — Brahms — the romantic of the century.

Over the last year or so, the Cairo Opera House has been host to a remarkable display of all the orchestral music of Brahms with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra under its conductor Ahmed El-Saedi. It has enabled many to come to terms with Brahms from new angles, under exciting circumstances. The effect of this concert, for example, further illumines Brahms. El-Saedi knows Brahms from his own personal view-point, puts this special aspect forth and the result is — a further deepening of the Brahmsian mystery.

This second concerto plunged us deep into the mystery. The man Brahms has a face that casts a thousand shadows, yet hardly ever a bright light. He is like the cormorant bird, swooping away over a seascape — you lose him — then, there he is, perched atop a rocky precipice, far above you, preening himself in the sun or the wind or rain or storm-tossed, then falling from the heights like a stone and disappearing into the sea.



Brahms is like the cormorant bird, swooping away over a seascape — you lose him — then, there he is, perched atop a rocky precipice

The music for the opening of this concert takes all these plunges and forces the pianist to do the same. It is to Grutzmann's credit that she was able to do this. Brahms is not merciful. His easiest sounding phrases bristle with perplexities and this concerto like the No. 1 is hardly piano music at all, it is a force of nature or a state of mind and must be grappled with as such. This player has, as well as physicality, one other thing even more needed in Brahms — the mental alertness and deep over-view of the music.

There is another aspect to Grutzmann also: she sits absolutely straight at the piano, and, while playing, has an old-fashioned arm movement which used to be called "Fanny Davies arms". Davies was a much exalted pupil of Clara Schumann who first put these immense concertos to public recognition. The arm movements look beautiful but are also practical, allowing the player rich tones; extreme agility and untiring energy. This concerto is bare-chested, but women pianists love it and seem to find a way through the muscular forms to ever new subtleties.

Grutzmann never tried the actor's way — histrionics. She stuck to the music *pure* and had her reward. This music is in a hurry. There is no rest in it: three movements, all *allegro*, with only one, the third, allowing space for rest. The first two movements offer great sweeping arches of piano playing which sink back into errant, capricious nostalgia of some past time or event, but nothing is ever stated visually. This composer always avoids the headlong approach, he always swerves from a narrative. At her beginnings, Grutzmann sounded tentative when it came to plunging and deep-diving, but she found her power mostly catching the nuances, however complicated, because the piano always runs away from the player in Brahms.

The orchestra in the second movement was exemplary, never hurrying, pushing or covering her, yet maintaining the necessary grandeur: Brahms, after all, is Brahms, dead or alive. Nothing in music is so salutary yet indispensable. He tells tales never to be repeated.

The third movement suddenly opens out into single notes, everything distanced from everything else. No peace. It's yet another aspect for being alone with notes you have to be polite with. This concerto has a habit of leaving the player unrecognised, high and dry, uninvited. With her fine attention to detail, Grutzmann was not upstaged. The smallest sounds had detail and form — she cared very much, was full of affection. Trills, trills, trills — the movement dies away on long, finally relaxing trills. Expiration is also not easy in Brahms.

The last part of the work, the dance — how good the orchestra sounded! The pianist gave the necessary opalescent shading, half-lit. This part is cerebral, like watching the workings of the mind through a machine called the piano, but never cold. Here the music grows Augustan and full of panache. Again, Brahms becomes the mystery man. He does open out into a sort of heart-felt revelation. But this is a withdrawal, stylish and speedy. He's going to swoop again, and he does, finally. Don't ever listen even to your mad mother Clara Schumann, hereabouts, just play for your life like hell. Grutzmann did and brought the cliff-hanger to a tremendous finish.

Beethoven Symphony No 3 E flat major op 55. And here it comes again — the *Eroica*. It has presence and celebrity beyond anything musical. The Taj Mahal of European thought, gleaming and perfect. It long ago ceased to be merely music. History claimed it. It is almost Europe itself — Chartres, the Rhine. Whole nations passed through it. Napoleon, Beethoven, War and Peace.

Now the third has become a sort of multi-media mix-up. Where does Napoleon begin and the David portrait of him end? He's going up on his stallion, over the Alps, like Hannibal, with the mad dream of European unity. Beethoven's music both ignites and extinguishes. The lights go on at the beginning, go off in resignation, but finally hope sputters at the end. Is that the parable of the *Eroica*?

What does Ahmed El-Saedi and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra do with it? Incredible — they do very little. They leave it alone. More or less to speak for itself — like darkness at midnight, bringing light with the dawn. Beethoven's symphonies have long ago ceased to be a family group. He made them as the father, but they have taken off and now they go through the world each as a solitary unit. Once it was not like this, the father was there standing in the middle. Maestros paid attention to the legend in hand, because Beethoven was untouchable. Now, the unity is broken and the symphonies all, including the hallowed 9th, have entered a kind of Internet of their own and operate as independent units.

El-Saedi's *Eroica* is not heroic. It's a loner, in from the outside, representing itself, not the legend of Europe or the composer's political hopes. The Cairo Symphony did a strange and wonderful job on it. They played the notes, gave the sound and what came out was not so much legend and heartbreak, lost opportunities or death but a hymn to clarity. Think it out piece by piece, moment by moment, phrase by phrase, leave it to take its own shape. You could end by not caring what happens to the *Eroica* in its old form.

The portraits in the old drama have melted away, and what we had from the Cairo group was not the high romantic fate of nations so much as an abstract formal peace, stripped of narrative connivance, almost Bach-like. The end grew ever more staccato, bright and dazzling. The once deep, portentous funeral march has left its Nietzschean foot-prints behind. No-one was being carried away in a flag-draped coffin. Most of Beethoven's greats had gone on pension long ago with Napoleon. And the Marche Funebre gave way to a brilliant Scherzo. This *Eroica* sparked on until the end which was bright, sparked and a trifle dry, but what life-giving, dust-free journey we had taken. We ended the *Eroica* journey on full batteries.

Cinema

Of flesh and blood

Villains wear trench coats and nymphets swim across the screen. Nevertheless, **Paul Geday** finds a modicum of quality in two recently released commercial films

They're all there — all the ingredients of the blockbuster: sex, glamour, greed, revenge: you name it. In fact, the whole script of *Imra'a Fawq El-Qemma* ("A Woman at the Top"), directed by Ali Badrakhan and released during the *Eid*, is tailored around Ne'mat Abdel-Ghaffar, the character played by sex-symbol Nadia El-Guindi.

When Ne'mat proudly announces her pregnancy to her new and very rich husband, Adham El-Mawardi (played by Gamal Abdel-Nasser) whom she married *urfi*, not only does he refuse to recognise the child but steals the marriage contract, thus annulling it. Ne'mat then remarries her first husband, Bassiouni (played by Ahmed Bedeir) whose impotence had caused their divorce. Bassiouni and Adham negotiate an out-of-court settlement.

Starting out in the '70s with a capital of half a million pounds, Bassiouni and Ne'mat have by the '90s built an empire. Adham shows up, and it's time for retaliation.

Thereafter, it's war. Corruption, seduction and power games are the order of the day — although, by way of motives, we are led to believe that Ne'mat and Adham are still in love. Sex ranks high among the priorities of the authors. There are sexy girls in bikinis — nymphets swimming across the screen — and, of course, Mrs El-Guindi's cleavage. Her wardrobe, a veritable catalogue of oriental erotica, must have cost a substantial sum. And she exercises her charms whenever necessary.

The picture contains quite a bit of sleeping around and many strands of the plot have sexual undertones. Thus the fact that Bassiouni, the first husband, is impotent amounts to the basic premise of the film. From this revelation onwards, it's incest galore. Practically everybody seems to be involved in a relationship with Dina (played by the young actress Nahla Salama), including Adham Bey and his son Tamer who is made to believe that Adham is Dina's father.

In a society where the moral message is of the essence, this film stands out as being unusually immoral. However, lots of details sound just right in this Egyptian version of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The authors undoubtedly know the world they are describing. There is some flesh in the characters. And this makes for a welcome change. The rich, for once, are not caricatures. As for the poor, these — with the exception of Dina's father who turns out to be an upholsterer — are almost absent. The film is an ode to the power of money — in sharp contrast to another trend in Egyptian cinema which glorifies marginality.

The portrayal of today's rich kids, particularly Ne'mat's son Tamer, is quite exquisite. Another gem is the larger-than-life bodyguard, complete with well-cut double-breasted suit and earphones. It was, though, the first time I had ever heard of parents and armed bodyguards being allowed in the *takhshiba* (prison cell).

That said, the film stands out technically. It is lean, has no *longeurs* and is well-wrought. Ramses Marzouk's cinematography is good and the art direction is almost flawless. Nadia El-Guindi is totally at ease in the lead and puts on a good performance. Above all, she sounds right and is convincing. As for secondary characters, they are well-cast and do add a certain amount of humour and charm to the film.

It is the ending of the film, however, that is a bit of a "cut and paste" job. No happy ending, it has the appearance of having been required by the censors: redemption coming at last, Adham Bey being killed in a superfluous shoot out by a group of terrorists who barge into the Supreme Court and, as the body is covered with newspapers, we read: "52 officials arrested. Conspiracy plot against Egypt foiled." It is the only moralistic strand in the film.

In contrast to "A Woman at the Top", Nader Galal's *Hassan El-Loll*, another *Eid* release, is a moralistic tale, complete with a love story, a final chase scene and a happy ending (it is always reassuring in a film to be able to tell the good guys from the bad guys).

Hassan (Ahmed Zaki) is called "El-Loll" to rhyme with *fuul* flowers which he loves and which he pronounces with a Port Said accent. The setting of the film, in Lake Manzalah, goes back to an old tradition of Egyptian action movies. Generations were brought up on these films where Emad Hamdi was usually the good guy and Farid Shawki and Mahmoud El-Meligi the bad ones. This film, however, does not make full use of the rich location of the reed-covered lake, the slender, flat boats specific to the area, nor does it make use of the traditional dress of the fishermen of Port Said. But then, perhaps times have changed.

The elements of the plot of *Hassan El-Loll*, however, are so faithful to the tradition — villains, smugglers, the police and a drug-smuggling scheme — that the film is almost a remake. Yet the plot itself is slightly different if not highly improbable, but then again, films are supposed to make people dream. Sherine Reda plays the beautiful, liberated daughter of a local tycoon. On her way back from Cairo where she lives, her car breaks down. She is rescued by Hassan, a good guy and small-time smuggler. Hassan gives her a glimpse of the colourful underworld of the port and, naturally, she falls for him. Her father and his devilish secretary, played by Ezzat Abu Ouf, try to break them apart. They fail. Meanwhile, Hassan manages to uncover their drug-smuggling scheme.

Hassan El-Loll clearly incorporates clichés of the "film noir": villains do wear good old trench coats, naughty boys look like naughty boys and the rich and the bold drive Mercedes cars, of which there are plenty. There is, however, a plot point that leaves one puzzled. As the trucks carrying the goods stuffed with heroin are being searched, the police, although present throughout, do not manifest themselves to arrest the gang or prevent the ensuing fight. What appears as a script problem, though, is intended to allow for the insertion of two more fights, a bloody murder and, of course, the final chase scene. Another problem, on the technical level: the peak of the chase scene seems to have been originally filmed on video then transferred on film — an unacceptable practice.

Sherine Reda was lovely in swimming suit, in an improbable love scene on the beach. Another unlikely situation, given the Egyptian context, was her co-habitation with Hassan after her elopement (what would the neighbours say!). The film, nevertheless, flows and is enjoyable. As with "A Woman at the Top", the secondary characters are in flesh and blood. Traditionally in Egyptian cinema, secondary characters were played by very talented actors and greatly enhanced the texture of films. Perhaps this tradition is now being tapped into.

What the two films have in common is the quality of their production. Although they are both purely commercial products, they are still good: a contradiction in terms. Both created by producer (Hani Guirgis) and "artistic producer" (Magdi Abdel-Messih), they are clearly the result of well-orchestrated team work. I think we are witnessing a significant change. To produce quality commercial films is a true challenge — and this is what cinema is essentially all about: entertainment.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Essam Ma'rouf
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4484. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 3 April.

Electronic Exhibition
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 303 1514. 8 & 9 April.
On display are CD-ROMs and online databases from Britain.

Gaber Nassar (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 10 April.

Hisham El-Zeiny
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 10 April.

Shozo Harada (Watercolours) & Kamiko Harada (Japanese Flower Arrangements)
El-Shomou Gallery, Villa 12, 150 El-Horreiya Sq, Maadi. Tel 350 0081. 4-10 April 11am-8pm; 11 April 11am-5pm.

Remembering Mario Rossi
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9.30am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 12 April.
In celebration of the Italian architect's centenary.

George Bahgory & Afif Sharfawi (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4pm-8.30pm. Until 15 April.
Under the title Homes and Places, the artists exhibit works inspired by Sanaa and Wahran respectively.

Valparaiso: A Legend Between Two Centuries (Lithographs, post cards & photographs)
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 30 March-15 April. Opening hours: 3 and 6-10 April 10am-1pm & 4pm-8pm; 4 & 5 April and 11-15 April 5pm-8pm.

The Water of The Desert (Photographs)
Al-Ahram Gallery, Al-Ahram Bldg, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786300. Daily 9am-10pm. Until 27 April.

AUC Art Students Exhibition
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 16 April.

Ahmed Abdel-Karem (Paintings) & Halim Yacoub (Sculptures)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 16 April.

Jean Crotti (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab el-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 3 May.
New works under the title Pas Sages Comme Les Images.

Domestic Architecture in Islamic Egypt
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, corner of El-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. Sun-Wed 8.30am-7pm, Thur 8.30am-5pm & Sat 12pm-5pm. Until 5 May.

Ann Parker
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 8 May.
These 34 colour photographs record the palette of mostly self-taught artists exemplifying the folk art of the Great Pilgrimage. Included are representations of the Kaaba, images of transportation, calligraphic inscriptions and pastoral renderings of Islamic worship.

Homes and Places

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge.

FILMS

The Old Bear Hunter
Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 355 3962/3. 3 April, 6pm.

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
5 April, 7pm: **Morte A Venezia**, directed by L. Visconti (1971).
6 April, 7pm: **Ladri Di Biciclette**, directed by V de Sica (1948).

German Films (in conjunction with The Water of The Desert exhibition)
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex Bustan St), Downtown. Tel 575 9877.
8 April, 7pm: **Fata Morgana** (1970) directed by Werner Herzog.
9 April, 7pm: **Halbmond** (1995) directed by Frieder Schlaich.

Spanish Films
Instituto Cervantes for Spanish Culture, 20 Adly St, Kodak passage, Downtown. Tel 3601746.
6 April, 7.30pm: **Fabula De La Bella Palomera**, directed by Ruy Gerra.
9 April, 7.30pm: **Milagro en Roma**, directed by Lisandro Duque Naranjo.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit And Adila II)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Hallaq Housh
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Imra'a Fawq El-Qemma (A Woman at the Top)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Hassan El-Loll
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm.

Nasser '56
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.

The Daylight
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.

Tin Cup
New Odeon II, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

That Thing You Do
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

French Kiss
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. New Odeon III, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Jerry Maguire
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame
Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

One Fine Day
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Glimmer Man
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Heaven's Prisoner
Karim II, as above. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

The Craft
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Solo
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

The Cable Guy
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur & Sat, midnight.

MUSIC

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 3 April, 8pm.
Alfredo Perl from Chile performs.

Akhnaton Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 4 April, 8pm.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra & Bremen Cathedral Choir
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 5 April, 9pm.
Performing Brahms' Ein Deutsches Requiem, with soprano soloist Caroline Dumas and bass-baritone Reda El-Wakil, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

Harp Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 6 April, 8pm.
Manal Mohieddin performs.

One-Man Show for Children
Premises of the Association for Cardiorheumatic Children, near the Mena House Hotel, Pyramids Plateau, Giza. 6 April, 2pm.
Orchestrated by Mostafa El-Shazly's one-man band, his troupe, Habibi Salamtak, perform songs dating back to the 1950s.

The Anima String Quartet
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 9 April, 8pm.
Enobed Ahmedova, Oleg Ivantsev, Alexander Dzahmachili and Dimitri Goudimov will perform quartets by Borodin and Ashraf Fouad.

DANCE

The Nutcracker Ballet
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 5-9 April, 8pm.
Performed by the Bolshoi Theatre of Russia.

THEATRE

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm. Thur 10pm.
Starring Salah El-Saadani, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Balouza Fil Ballon (Balouza at the Balloon)
Balloon Theatre, Corniche El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily 9pm.

Messa' El-Kheir Ya Masr (Good Evening Egypt)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 9pm.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell, Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9pm.

LECTURES

The Greek Theatre in Egypt
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 3 April, 6pm.
A discussion held on the sixth meeting of Forum Romanum, with guest of honour Samiha Ayoub, followed by the projection of the first part of *The Fall of the Roman Empire*.

The Influence of Non-Muslim Interpreters on European Trade with the Ottoman Empire, A Preliminary Report
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Dr Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 3 April, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Maurits van den Boogert, Leiden University.

Reading Shakespeare
Blue Room, SS Bldg, Greek Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 7 April, 4pm.
Lecture by Dr Thomas Blackburn from Swarthmore College.

Soudan: Vers Une Recomposition Du Champ Politique?
CEDEJ, 14 Gam'eyet El-Nisr St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 8 April, 5pm.
Lecture in French by Dr Roland Marchal.

Excavating Nea Pahos – The Ptolemaic and Roman Capital of Cyprus
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, 11 Mahalla St, Heliopolis. Tel 415 6278. 8 April, 6pm.
Lecture by Professor Wiktor Daszewski director of the Polish Archaeological Mission in Marina El-Alamein and Nea Pahos.

The Discovery of The Workmen Community in Giza
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 9 April, 7pm.
Lecture by Dr Zahi Hawas, director general of the Giza Pyramids Plateau and Saqqara, SCA.

The Ancient Textile Industry at Amarna
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 303 1514. 9 April, 7pm.
Lecture by Barry Kemp, field director of the Egypt Exploration Society mission to Tel El-Amarna.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Girgis Lotfi (detail)

LOVERS of the Moulid is the title under which over 60 paintings by Girgis Lotfi are on exhibit at Al-Hanager. These fix, and momentarily freeze, the hustle and bustle of the *mawalid* in the hieratic forms of the Coptic icons. A hint of the Coptic and Pharaonic in the lines employed, of the folkloric in the occasional motif and of the fauvist in the daring, almost garish colours — all combine harmoniously in Lotfi's very technically accomplished paintings.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**



Sailing through no-man's-land

Philippe Genty's and Mary Underwood's *Voyageur Immobile*, at the Opera, takes **Nehad Selaiha** on a mind-boggling journey of Odyssean magnitude

At first, I could not tell, in the total darkness that engulfed the stage and auditorium, where the madly jabbering voice was coming from. It took me some minutes to discover a small spot of light down stage left. It seemed to be coming from a box, and fitfully revealed the spectral face of a man apparently squatting and talking ceaselessly into the invisible source of light directed at him from down below. Occasionally, he made frantic attempts to shut out (or, rather, in) the light with his bat. He looked and sounded quite eerie, the same as the faint, but vaguely threatening sound effects in the background. More disturbing still, one could not make out what that demented voice was saying. I thought I caught a word here, a phrase there; but those with far better French than mine assure me that the frenzied verbal avalanche was pure gibberish.

This unsettling image persisted for a few more minutes, then suddenly, the lights went up on stage and, lo and behold! A group of castaways on a desert island in the middle of a big blue sea. It felt as if they had all spilt out of the invisible box containing the light, or as if the imprisoned light had managed to escape and dispel the darkness, revealing what had always been there.

The effect was magical. It did not matter that the island was a small, square platform, or that the sea was a huge plastic, or cellophane, sheet that covered the stage completely, with air pumped underneath it to make it billow. The scene was so enchanting one could not help surrendering to the illusion, suspending the rational point of view, and embracing this world of make-believe.

The castaways, a weird assortment of people vaguely reminiscent of times past, were frozen in a *tableau vivant* for a few moments then came to life, indulging in various antics. One man, dressed as a colonial officer, mimed the positions of a classical ballerina; another, in his underwear, a sports cap on his head and a puffed up white tulle skirt round his waist, declaimed snatches from Hamlet's famous "To be" soliloquy, mercilessly swaying the air with his arms. A woman with pigtails and a white dress (vaguely suggesting the conventional image of a fairytale princess) went up to another woman dressed in baggy men's trousers and suspenders and covering her head with a rubber helmet sporting a green crest, unzipped her flies and inserted her hand inside. After some feeling about, she produced a small, mechanical toy bird and threw it up in the air. It circled once or twice, then flopped down into the sea. The others — two men in suits and hats and a woman in a straight white gown with frills — mimed various actions, including arguing and quarreling. There were even sudden eruptions of song. The cramped space made the sequence all the more exciting. The danger that one of the castaways could easily tip over was always present.

This crazy medley of actions which gives the characters, so early in the performance, an ambivalent identity as both adults (which is what they look) and children (which is how they behave), was punctuated at intervals with pauses when the actors would freeze, gaze out to sea, shade their eyes to scour the horizon for a boat, and hold that position for seconds. Was it after one such pause that the little boat appeared? I cannot remember: I was already feeling breathless and dizzy like someone on the brink of a stunning discovery or about to be catapulted into space. What I remember is that, suddenly, it was there — a small (really tiny compared to the adult actors), pathetic white toy boat, crossing the stage from left to right and braving the, by then, more agitated waves.

It reminded me of the toy paper boats we used to make as children and float in the sink, the bath tub or a bowl out on the balcony. When it was the sink, one sometimes enjoyed turning on the tap just as the boat was passing underneath it and, playing at being malignant fate without knowing it, laugh at seeing it capsize and sink. And this is exactly what happened to Genty's boat. But this time, the tap was up in the flies and some mysterious hand turned it on. As the boat shuddered and sank under the force of the thin, relentless stream of water shooting down from above, I felt I was receding into the past at light speed, carried by these plastic, fictional waves back to the world of the nursery, the doll's house and the playground. It was thrilling and frightening. At my age, you forget what the world was really like when you were 2 or 5 or even 7 — that is, before you had become conditioned to systematise, categorise, schematise, rationalise and verbalise your sensations and learnt to cut up reality as you experience it into neat segments and divide it among the many arbitrary pigeonholes carefully labeled fact, fiction, dreams, lies, artistic imaginings or hallucinations.

Like most mothers, I was blessed with a few glimpses of that "unrationalised" reality when my daughter was a baby and toddler. Through her eyes I rediscovered the freshness, novelty and latent potential for artistic reshaping of the basest of materials and most ordinary of objects; she brought home to me the fact that, like poets, children relate to the world primarily through metaphor. Such glimpses, however, can prove too much to bear, like gulping too much oxygen all of a sudden. Reliving the experience of the sinking paper boat left me feeling heady and somewhat disoriented. The feeling sharpened when I suddenly found the castaways inside a cardboard packing crate, clearly marked 'fragile'. The island had magically disappeared and been replaced by a ship tossing on the waves. The actors, themselves, had effected the transformation by a cunning sleight of hand: but it had been done so quickly that, though I had seen them handling bits of cardboard earlier and passing them around, I hardly noticed it.

A sequence of quick, short, silent scenes, involving two or three actors at a time, and once a puppet, followed. Some were naughty and broadly comic, some downright farcical, and one morbidly and harrowingly grotesque. In the row in front of me, two children about 6 or 7 were laughing uproariously, and no wonder. They were right in their element where dolls can have a will of their own, where a moving finger can become a crawling insect, and where it takes only a small and effortless leap of the imagination to jump inside a box and merrily sail away. I could not share their merriment; the sight of that lonely crate, with its fragile human cargo, floating precariously, in the moonlight, on a wide, empty sea, with a wall of impenetrable darkness all around, was too painful a metaphor of the human condition to leave room for laughter.



"It was clear... that Genty's 'voyageur', though 'immobile', did not intend to stop at rediscovering the world of the nursery and, with it, a mode of perception beyond the boundaries of reason and commonsense (a mode children know and we have lost), but meant to sail deeper and carry us with him to explore the subterranean regions of the mind, the secret waterways under the polished floorboards, the world of dreams and archetypes"

It was clear by then that Genty's 'voyageur', though 'immobile', did not intend to stop at rediscovering the world of the nursery and, with it, a mode of perception beyond the boundaries of reason and common sense (a mode children know and we have lost), but meant to sail deeper and carry us with him to explore the subterranean regions of the mind, the secret waterways under the polished floorboards, the world of dreams and archetypes. Indeed, already, the archetypal metaphor of life as a voyage on a turbulent sea had become a living reality on stage — though palpably artificial, a matter of plastic and cardboard. The rapid flow of Genty's concrete theatrical metaphors had the effect of collapsing the boundaries between illusion and reality, the natural and the artificial, the adult and the child, the animate and inanimate, establishing a new logic that relies on metaphors and correspondences in making sense of the world, rather than 'cause and effect', and on ambivalence and paradox as a mode of signification. This collapsing of rational boundaries could be seen and sensed everywhere, and was the moving spirit of the work and its guiding structural principle. It orchestrated the flow of images and sequences into a visual symphony that took its rhythm from the sea, the ebb and flow of its waves.

It took me sometime to realise that, despite its overpowering spontaneous flow and obvious fluidity, the performance was subtly organised into four successive movements, corresponding to the four natural elements, with the accent in the first and third on air and water, in the second, on earth and fire, and in the fourth on earth. Each movement seemed to flow out of the other quite naturally, suggesting a process of continuous reproduction and the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth, and the rhythm of their succession invoked, through Gealle De Malglaive's stunningly intricate lighting design, the rhythm of the movement from night to dawn, to noon and twilight.

The theme of reproduction surfaces midway through the first movement and is metaphorically and ironically joined, through the big crate marked 'fragile', to the theme of packaging. Julie Andrews' 'brown-paper packages, tied up with string' (in her famous song) may not always be a source of comfort. In Genty's world, or no-man's-land, they can hold a doll or a human, be a gift or a coffin. The first baby we see is in the form of a man's face, appearing from under the cover of a serving dish through a hole in the big crate. The castaways have apparently become cannibals, feeding on their children. But, then, a human figure rises from the box, his head wrapped round, removes what looks like the top of his skull, and proceeds to pluck out his brain and stuff it into the mouth of the screaming and spitting baby. When the adult figure finally collapses a woman replaces the dish-cover on top of the baby's face.

The first movement ends with two riveting scenes that establish reproduction and packaging (ambivalently viewed) as the controlling themes of the work. In one, the sea is quiet, the wind has died down. A man comes out of the crate, which now seems deserted, as if all its passengers had died; his body is completely covered with cardboard boxes which makes his movements comically awkward: he steps gingerly into the water to explore his surroundings and eventually, as he becomes more confident, discards the cartons round his body, leaving only the ones on his feet. In the next scene, the crate, which the man had tipped to lie on its side before he disappeared, becomes a doll's house, made of four square compartments or boxes. Each holds the body of a soft and floppy baby doll with one of the actors providing it with a human head. At once, the image of the womb was superimposed on that of the doll's house. The human heads chatter, sing and quarrel, then, suddenly, the sea, now completely dark, suddenly swells and the four boxes separate and flow away on the invisible waves and are swallowed by the darkness. Labels like black theatre or surrealism fail to describe the shattering impact and symbolic power of this scene.

As the dark blue sheet covering the stage is pulled away, like the tide going out, the second movement flows in. The light changes: it's sunrise, and we have arrived at a rugged desert. On one side, at the back, there is a toytown; on the opposite side, a hill. A toy truck, which recalls the toy ship in the first movement, crosses the stage slowly on its way to the toytown. Then the seven castaways start, one by one, to rip through the paper sheets covering the stage and appear from underneath them. The dead have risen, and, once more, they are both adults playing at being children and children playing at being adults. When the man with the white skirt drops down, like a hen laying an egg, dozens of plastic baby dolls from under his skirt, the actors quarrel over them, play father and mother to them, sing nursery rhymes, then form a train an push the dolls in a row in the direction of the town. There, the lights of a toy fairground and a carousel shine, but the visit to the fairground gives way to a gruesome reproduction game where the plastic dolls are successively fed into a toy cannon, shot into a toy processing machine, and received at the other end into small plastic bags. The movement ends with what looks like an amorphous, moving white mass, erupting out of the small hill, and rolling on, heaving and swelling, to cover the whole stage and drown everything. It is another huge plastic sheet with air pumped into it to create another sea; but, this time, it looks like a white sea of clouds. The castaways are glimpsed popping up and down among the high waves, then a winged woman in white, holding a red rose, floats into view. We soon discover she is the angel of death and the touch of her rose is lethal. She reminded me of Charon, the ferryman who, in Greek mythology, brought the dead across the river of Styx or Acheron to Hades. It seemed that those travellers struggling among the waves, some carrying suitcases or handbags, were on their way to heaven, or the other world. But in Greek mythology there were no customs officers at the gates of Hades to ask you to show your passport or open your suitcase. Here, they were, in suits and hats, shouting in various tongues. One by one, the travellers are encased in big, transparent plastic bags, float away and go under. The movement ends with a shower of plastic baby dolls, the same we had seen earlier, hanging down from little, white, fluttering parachutes, and descending upon the clouds. Immediately, the wind dies, and the white plastic sheet quickly recedes and disappears.

The fourth movement takes us back to an even more cheerless desert than the one before. The lighting dims, creating a kind of lurid and unearthly twilight. Dance plays a major role in this movement; but despite the thrilling choreography and the breath-taking proficiency of the actors, the general mood is at once elegiac, grotesque and nightmarish. After showing us the artistic potential of plastic and cardboard, Genty, with his stage-designer, Martin Rezard, explore here the potential of different types of brown wrapping paper. Like the plastic bags which encased the actors in the previous movement, brown paper is here, in one sequence, wrapped round the actors, one by one, and moulded round their bodies. When the last of the seven (note the choice of number) has been wrapped and moulded, the stage, with the scattered, recumbent, immobile figures, looks like a graveyard.

But, unseen, the actors had slipped out of their moulds (which kept their shapes) unnoticed. They suddenly appear en masse and proceed to jump up and down on the brown paper shapes to flatten them. It was a moment of true wonder and magical in its effect. I am almost sure that the sequence of the grotesque human-size puppet followed. But in the presence of such a dizzying whirl of images, it is difficult to be certain. Before one had had time to assimilate one image, another, equally vivid, evocative and disturbing, had replaced it. The man puppet appears out of a cardboard box and institutes himself as the leader of the group on their flight (or march?) out of the graveyard in the direction of the audience. While the actors mime running, the puppet, held on both sides by two actors, seems to be advancing with wide, firm steps. At the beginning, it is dressed in a medieval suit of armour; but, during the march, it falls off to reveal a man's suit, then the trousers fall, and we discover a pair of stockinged female legs in a seductive garter belt. And as if that were not enough, the puppet, itself, begins to fall apart — first an arm, then a leg, then another arm, until nothing remains but the head and trunk. The puppet had braved its disasters and continued to march until the last limb. The great escape (or march of human progress?) fails: the leader was only a travesty. The actors try to pack what remained of the puppet back in the box, but it resists, and finally sticks its head in a sheet of brown paper and flies away, looking like a huge, mythical bat, with a human head, and leaving its body behind. All the transformations of this puppet were effected by the actors themselves whose puppeteering skills match their superb dancing, miming and vocal proficiency.

I cannot pretend to remember how the performance ended, and, perhaps, we are not meant to. All I remember after the horrible nightmare of the bat is some actors walking about reciting snatches of vaguely familiar poems, one of them about empty cities. I also remember rushing out of the auditorium, forgetting my shawl behind, and feeling quite stunned and numb. The feeling persisted for over two hours afterwards and I could not sleep that night.

To describe *Le Voyageur Immobile* as haunting is not just inadequate, but positively insulting: such words have became debased by over-use. It is one of those rare theatrical works which seem designed to teach critics humility, and drive home to them the inadequacy of any critical jargon, indeed, of verbal language itself to deal with the stuff that dreams are made of.

Plain Talk

It is amazing how certain topics keep coming up from time to time and how, no matter how many times they are revisited, there is always a new variation on the theme. One such topic is the threat posed by the visual arts, particularly cinema, to the written word.

Have television and film won the battle for story-telling? This was the theme of a series of talks, under the rubric "Writing in Light", held at no less than the Royal Festival Hall. The series lasted for a whole month and the audiences listened to talks by leading British writers and filmmakers.

The talks, according to Stephen Amidon in *The Sunday Times*, "is a powerful cultural neurosis that the cinema is either a vandal at loose in the world's libraries, ruthlessly tearing up texts and whispering dangerous nothings into the ears of working novelists, or a benevolent dictator who condescends to lend a helping hand to his aged, enfeebled ancestor."

Soon after its appearance, film was viewed with suspicion, as a menace to the written word and, by extension, the literary world at large. Way back in the forties, I remember, the issue was hotly debated in the course of a PEN conference which was attended by writers from the four corners of the globe. The vast majority of writers present expressed their apprehensions about film and the media in general.

J B Priestly, for one, was of the opinion that ignoring the growing power of the film industry would be to the detriment of creative writers. Rather portentously, I recall, he called for "storming the world of the visual" — in other words, what he was recommending was that writers descend from their ivory towers and negotiate a role for themselves within the medium.

And this is exactly what has been happening. Most of the classical films were based on bestselling contemporary novels by F Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner and Aldous Huxley. Likewise, screen adaptations were made of classics by Tolstoy, Dickens and Jane Austen.

Indeed, publishers have long known that the magic words "now a major Hollywood movie", strategically placed on the jacket of a novel, will go a long way in enhancing sales. After the latest screen adaptation of Jane Austen hordes rushed out to buy her novels in paperback, as happened with Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* (and the same, one suspects will happen with *The English Patient*, thanks to the many Oscars it reaped). For, as one critic put it, "the films will be over after a limited or even a long show, [but] these books will be around for another 150 years (and another 150 after that)."

It would be hard to imagine the successful careers of certain filmmakers without literature. Indeed, such is the appeal of the film version of a literary text that novelists often receive huge advances for works they have not even begun to write. Astutely, many writers have mastered the art of scenario writing and adapt their own novels, thus ensuring the integrity of the screen version — the prime examples in Egypt being Naguib Mahfouz and Youssef El-Sebai. Elsewhere, though, novelists have beckoned quite blatantly to the camera by writing fiction that some have described as "screenplays-in-waiting".

Most story-telling techniques used in film, claims Amidon, have clear antecedents in literature. With its zooms and graphic visual effects, *Beowulf* — written some 900 years before the advent of the camera — bears an uncanny resemblance to an actual script, while *The Canterbury Tales* "perfected the close-up", to quote Amidon again.

Fitzgerald has an oft-quoted adage: "movies have taken away our dreams". To this, however, there is the reply that long before the Lumière brothers invented their projector, the unravelling of a yarn invariably had people in its thrall.

But not all writers have felt cheated by the screen. Graham Greene, for one, was a great enthusiast for cinema and consequently, his novels worked beautifully on screen. For it was Greene's opinion that writers should go into the film industry, despite its drawbacks, the corruption and filth. For, argued Greene, the smile, on the long run, will be on the writer's face, since "the book has a longer life."

Mursi Saad El-Din

Al-Ahram Weekly

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photo: Nour Soleih

An urban aesthetics

Is urban planning subject to the rules of beauty and the beholder? Well, some would say ugly is indisputable: impersonal high-rises mar the sky-line, informal settlements spoil the view and the colour purple is the flavour of the day. Visual pollution was the topic of a conference organised at Cairo University's Faculty of Engineering by the National Association for the Protection of the Environment. **Fayza Hassan** attended

During a conference organised this week by the Dokki Community branch of the National Association for the Protection of the Environment, architects argued about ways and means of limiting the visual pollution scarring the character of the Cairene landscape.

Problems linked to the aesthetics of a city are as numerous and complex as they are difficult to tackle, but they do represent a body of topics which draw together specialists and amateurs eager to point out the general visual degradation of the capital. The conference touched on four aspects, which, according to Suhaila El-Sawi, head of the Dokki community branch, were the main agents of visual pollution: traffic and parking problems, disfigurement of public space by advertisement billboards, lack of systematic garbage collection services and the absence of aesthetic considerations in new building enterprises. The debate centered on the latter point, but failed to address problems of structure, urban morphology and architectural typology, thus reducing the issues to simple matters of exterior decoration.

Architect Sayed El-Tuni established the architectural relationship between form and function, and argued that architecture is, first and foremost, the reflection of a country's culture. To declare that a given building is an agent of visual pollution, he noted, assumes that there are absolute criteria against which it is measured. Criteria of beauty vary according to communities, time and artistic inclinations. Moreover, social and economic considerations often take precedence over pure aesthetics. The informal settlements sprouting in and around Cairo are a case in point. Another example can be observed in Madinet El-Awqaf, a well-planned set of buildings erected in 1944. Today it is bursting at the seams with many destitute families living in the streets. Dr Amr No'man, head of the Architecture Department, Cairo University, commented that, although architects may have given due attention to the exterior aspects of buildings, these are often tampered with by occupants who will add an extra room by enclosing a balcony or defacing it with a few extra storeys in an entirely different — and more economical — style, years after the original building has been completed. Nearly 2000 years ago, the Roman architect Vitruvious described the goals of architecture as use, strength and beauty. At its largest, architecture seeks to design useful and beautiful neighbourhoods, cities and metropolitan areas.

This may have been the goal pursued by Khedive Ismail when he set out to systematically Hausmannise his capital. That he chose to dissimulate the old city behind a facade of Western-style palaces and administrative buildings, instead of attempting to restore Islamic Cairo, may have contributed to the creation of the successive slum areas which, occupied by poorer tenants and owners unable to afford the buildings' upkeep, fell into total neglect. Meanwhile, new quarters were continuously developed, on which the undivided attention of foreign architects was lavished. As Cairo expanded towards brighter horizons, it left behind a trail of abandoned areas which were promptly taken over by the less affluent segments of society. This trend continued well into he 20th century; in 1930, Cairo's last boom in villa- and palace-building took place, with no or very little thought given to planning for the poorer communities.

The 1952 Revolution endeavoured to reverse the tide, embarking on a rash, haphazard programme of low-income housing and administrative buildings' production, often with total disregard to the existing, or, at times, non-existing infrastructure. Rectangular boxes in stark cement housing low-income communities changed the character of formerly green areas or large avenues, while rural migrants and newly-weds, unable to secure accommodation in the new type of "popular" constructions, built their own informal settlements in the vicinity.

The open-door policy with its crop of building contractors, intent on making the best out the circumstances, dotted the landscape with the latest in modern architectural style — the steel and glass skyscraping obstruction.

Thus, from the medieval city enfolded around its *haras*, to Ismail's palaces *à L'Européenne*, from the 1952 Revolution's utilitarian constructions, to the greedy contractors who, pushing at an open door, built their towers and satellite cities American-style, Cairo, already choking under the influx of rural migrants and the population explosion, has continued to grow like a monstrous octopus, extending its powerful tentacles in every direction, encroaching on agricultural land and the desert in the most unruly manner. It has spread unchecked, exploding the existing infrastructure, bringing in its wake all the problems endemic to a Third World megalopolis.

Under the circumstances, to speak of visual pollution and the form of buildings may seem an exercise in futility. Yet a certain nostalgia for the past, for what was once the Egyptians' testimony to their discerning artistic taste, remains. In her book *L'Education Alexandrine*, (Editions Azza Heikal, 1996) Azza Heikal describes her grandfather's attempt to beautify his beloved city of Alexandria: "The municipality, concerned with the beauty of the city, organises, as it does in Paris, a competition for the most beautiful building facades. It is AR (Abdel-Rahman Heikal, her grandfather) who is awarded he first prize; this earns him a tax exemption for a few years. Once started, nothing can stop him in his desire to erect buildings which are even more beautiful. 'It is the Pharaonic atavism', he quips... As soon as a building is finished, he starts on the next. He is not content to erect buildings of great standing, he wants them to be works of art. He hires an Italian architect, Ricardo Smith, who has already distinguished himself in the construction of buildings in the neo-Islamic style, such as the Moassat Mosque at El-Hadara and the Moassat Building at Ramleh Station in 1920." Abdel-Rahman Heikal completes his last building in 1933, recounts his granddaughter. This is how she describes it: "The ground floor is a continuation of finely chiselled arcades. This motif recurs on the following floors with a few variations in order to avoid boredom. Mosaics and geometrical motifs alternate, reminiscent of the decorations seen on beautiful mosques. The last storey is the crowning of the whole, a model of elegance, sculpture and decoration; the whole building is set off by guilded modlings and enterlacings, the golden hue of which has preserved its brightness sixty years on. The building is as beautiful inside as it is outside..." Her grandfather, writes Heikal, never built for profit: whatever his endeavour, she says, only quality counts. He does not care about cost. "If this aesthete participates actively in the evolution of his city, it is as a patron wanting to contribute to the embellishment of Alexandria. Isn't she called the queen of the Mediterranean?"

Sixty years later, neither Alexandria nor Cairo can claim royal status. More than anything, they need salvaging lest they become contenders for the title of the world's ugliest city. "At this point," says El-Sawi, "only through awareness, education of the young generations and concerted action by their inhabitants grouped in a variety of non-governmental organisations can we hope to reverse the combined action of all the factors bent on their course of destruction and help the cities regain at least part of their former magnificence."



Hello Dolly, this is Billy

Since your picture has flashed across the screens and graced the front pages of hundreds of magazines, largely outshining Madeleine Albright's, the world has been in turmoil. Are you aware of what you have accomplished by merely existing, Dolly? This is no longer about faraway Albanians, Croats, Kurds and Palestinians. These, the whole world can afford to ignore and generally *not* worry about. I mean, few can find these people's countries on a detailed map, so forget it; but you, Dolly, have torn away the very fabric of humanity — human beings' secure knowledge that each single one of them is unique.

I hope you don't mind me saying so, but you have put your little hoof right in it. They had hardly recovered from the cows' vengeance, and were starting to breathe freely, confronted every morning only with the spectacle of Netanyahu's madness, which in their minds is a far sight more bearable than the cows', and suddenly, here you are, literally come from nowhere to injure their egos mortally.

Because make no mistake about it, humans have been able to work out the simple concept that, if they managed to clone you, they will soon be able to clone them. They might no longer be unique, fancy that.

Well, Dolly, as a distant cousin, bearing in mind that blood is thicker than water, that we have to protect our own, no matter how obscure their origins, and that you look so pretty on television, I can honestly tell you that I am happy you are here. I have always enjoyed the sight of white flocks going to graze in the early morning, although right now, what with all these TV contracts, you may not have had any time to graze in peace.

What really scares me though, I don't mind telling you, is the not-so-distant future, when they are going to start cloning humans. They don't have such a brilliant track record, you know, and between you, me and the wall I don't think there is much worth copying there. Ugh! Who wants to see the current models reproduced *ad infinitum*? I wouldn't mind another Gandhi, though — he was kind to goats — but I don't really care for the others. They should seriously start working on a new, improved version. By cloning Molly, they did not run awful risks. You are a peace-loving lot, after all. Not a great deal of personality, on the whole, but it is rather an old-fashioned trait anyway, which is actively discouraged in high places.

Your kind of personality, on the other hand, is much more successful. Take Molly, for instance. She made no demands. Not that you haven't turned out quite cute, but really, wouldn't you have liked curlier hair, for instance? It's the fashion these days, you know. Larger eyes, maybe? A different colour? Think of all the possibilities, all the options that Molly turned down in your name. But you, Dolly, have a second chance. They are bound to come back, you don't know scientists, they are a persistent lot, and will keep going even though they have been told not to. They will want the clone's clone; they will just go on and on. Now that they are on the right track, there will be no stopping them, so be careful. You don't want to end up an ordinary guinea pig, experimented upon in their horrible laboratories. Get yourself a good agent and ask for a contract. Make demands, don't be shy: they owe you. You want maximum media coverage, prime time television, an appearance on Larry King, maybe? It is the least they can do for you. And you can ask for variations in your future clones (I can't really call them offspring, can I?) All they have to do is add some DNA here and there and presto, before you know it, you will have a little lamb to order.

You may consider the general looks of Madonna, which are quite versatile and lend themselves to different arrangements suitable for most occasions. You could also demand that your clones be given blond hair and the capacity of uttering words. Of course you bleat charmingly, I know, but I am sure you agree that it becomes monotonous after a while, especially if you are considering a public career. I realise that you are burning with stage fever right now, but there is more to life than being in the movies. With a human voice, the sky will be the limit for your clones' ambitions. Don't insist on what they call intelligence, it is considerably overrated and has been proven definitely redundant. Your brains are quite sufficient for the task at hand. In the meantime, keep yourself in the news so that, when the time comes, the future of your clones is guaranteed. Who knows? You may beget a head of state yet.

I hope, dear Dolly, that you are wise enough to heed my goatly advice. It is based on sound knowledge of the world and its occupants. And if they come for me, as I pray they will, I am ready. I already have compiled a long list of demands, starting with the quality of my hair. It is disgraceful, a real scandal that we are forced to go around with such poor pilary capabilities. I will certainly insist on my clone having a thicker, fluffier variety. I hope they will show me catalogues to choose from. As for the beard, they will have to remove it; it is ridiculous, and I have not found a single use for it. Finally, I will ask them in no uncertain terms to tell their cronies to stop eating us. If they are clever enough to clone us, surely they should be able to create their own food without having to murder an innocent victim every time they feel a bit peckish.

Well, dear Dolly, I have to go now. I hope I will keep seeing your sweet face on TV, and please tell them to put a little red bow on your head. You are worth being pampered, remember.

Your faithful friend,

Billy the goat

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Meatballs and mushrooms

Ingredients:

One kg. minced beef
1/2 kg. of fresh mushrooms or a 500 gm. can
One large onion (grated)
One large onion (finely chopped)
1/4 loaf pita or *baladi* bread
One cup milk
1/2 kg. green bell peppers (diced)
Two tomatoes (skinned and diced)
One cup fresh tomato juice
One tsp. crushed garlic
1/2 tsp. of each coriander and cumin
Butter + ghee
Salt + pepper + nutmeg (grated) + sweet paprika

Method:

Soak the bread for ten minutes in the milk then remove it and mash it well. Add the grated onion to the meat, season it with the spices, add the mashed bread and form into small balls. Fry them until brown in butter and ghee and remove on kitchen blotting paper. In a cooking pan, fry gently the chopped onion and garlic, then add the green pepper, the mushrooms, the tomatoes and their juice, season with salt and pepper and simmer over low heat for 15 minutes. Add the meatballs, cover and leave to cook. Serve with rice and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Wicker, wicker everywhere

Nigel Ryan courts things Thai

The basement of the new Nile Hilton Shopping Mall is now a food court — lots of wicker chairs, surprisingly comfortable, and tendrils of trailing greenery. At the centre of every circular table stands a multi-faceted menu, each of its arms detailing the food offered by any one of several outlets along the edges of the central court. Nor are you limited to any particular menu since you can, presumably, pick and choose between outlets, taking an entrée from, say, the Thai portion of the menu and something else from the American section. The individual menus, though, are rather limited, with the Thai outlet offering less than ten items. Still, it was from this section that we ordered: *tom yam gung* — a fragrant soup with prawns and mushrooms, *dim sum* served with the cutely named but not very precise "chicken buns", and *kao rad na gai*, chicken with cashew nuts.

Service, if occasionally inept, was never less than enthusiastic, and since this is a very new venture one is obliged to be a little patient with the staff who have yet to completely get the hang of things. Unfortunately, because each waiter must deal with several independent establishments, coordinating a meal could well prove difficult. As it was, drinks, once ordered from the waitress, took a remarkably long time to materialise on the table, the order having to be placed at the separate bar.

The soup, which arrived in large and impressive lidded bowls, was well worth the wait. Prawns and mushrooms, in a delicious broth, flavoured with lime juice and lemon grass, unapologetically aromatic though not overwhelmingly so.

Following the *tom yam gung*, both the *dim sum* and chicken dish were a trifle disappointing. The "chicken buns" that accompanied the *dim sum* turned out to be patés of minced chicken, battered and then fried, and perfectly pleasant, while the *dim sum*, with rice paper still attached, remained bland despite desperate quantities of soy sauce being added. The whole process of eating was unnecessarily complicated by the fact that the food arrived in a lidded wicker basket that had been lined with aluminium foil. Inevitably, spearing anything with a fork involved piercing the foil and thus dripping bits of food on the table.

The *kao rad na gai* was served, a little more practically, on a plate. Chinese radish, chicken, celery, onion, garlic and cashew nuts, lightly spiced, served with rice and those terribly complicated flowers cut out of vegetables that it always seems such a pity to eat. And though, after the soup, there was really very little to write home about, the food contrived to be passable in an amiable, non-committal kind of way.

All the outlets in the food court make use of the central bar which is, I presume, Hilton run. They do not, however, serve local beer and seem very keen on pushing draught Guinness.

The bill, which is the promptest thing to arrive, was a little less than LE140, which covered lunch for two, one bloody Mary and one pint of Guinness. If not quite a giveaway, it could well have been more. And so off we went.

The Food Court, Nile Hilton Shopping Mall, Tahrir Square

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

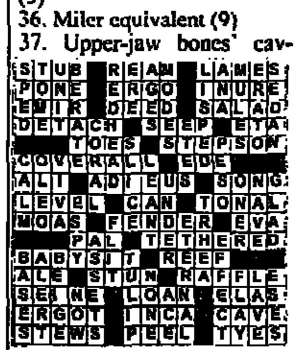
By Samia Abdennour

Across

1. Make suitable (5)
6. Bluish grey colour (5)
11. Put on an even keel; restitution (7)
14. Workshop (7)
16. Either's companion (2)
17. Abounding with a particular shade tree (4)
18. Black as ink (4)
19. Symbol for "cobalt" (2)
20. Initials of married lady (3)
22. Family tree (7)
24. Ruminants' food (3)
25. Labours under (4)
27. A rasping instrument (5)
28. Tortoise's rival (4)
29. Female elephants (4)
31. Owing (3)
32. Arrived (4)
33. Preserves (5)
35. Camels' storage places (5)
36. Miler equivalent (9)
37. Upper-jaw bones' cavities (5)
39. Frolic (5)
42. Opponents (4)
43. Prattle, sl. (3)
45. Wound reminder (4)
46. 2nd largest city in Nicaragua (4)
47. Russian collective enterprise of craftsmen (5)
49. Was aware (4)
51. John in Scotland (3)
52. Type of cleaner (7)
54. Sailor (3)
55. Symbol for "argon" (2)
56. But (4)
57. Bucket (4)
59. Therefore (2)
60. Coloured woman (7)
62. Greek letter (7)
64. Totaled (5)
65. Tibetan ass with thick furry coat (5)

Down

1. Redolence (5)
2. type of hoisting contrivance (7)
3. Public announcement, abb. (2)
4. Prefix for "before" (3)
5. Narrate (4)
6. French father (4)
7. type of deer (3)
8. King & Emperor, L. abb. (2)
9. Fasten (7)
10. East away; abrade (5)
12. Struck (4)
13. Meeting to debate; ecclesiastic council attended by bishops and delegated clergy (5)
14. Motto (5)
15. Labels (4)
21. Blackthorn: (4)
23. Calculate; take account of (9)
24. Tents' pitching area (4)
26. Sugar-coat (7)
28. Ship's hanging bed (7)
30. Stimulants; presses (5)
32. Peaks (5)
34. Health resort (3)
35. Written on some towels (3)
37. Fearful (7)
38. Midday (4)
40. Get all worked up (4)
42. Double cross (7)
43. Colours of old people's hair (5)
44. City in Japan (5)
46. Climbing and twining plant of tropical forest (5)
47. Shoemakers' pricking tools (4)
48. Hop (4)
50. Law-braking (5)
52. Trim, Sc. (4)
53. Imperil (4)
56. Scandinavian money (3)
58. Roman 52 (3)
61. Symbol for "gadolinium" (2)
63. Musical note (2)



Last week's solution


Largely uncontested by the opposition, next week's local council elections promise little excitement in party political terms. But, in Cairo's backstreets, few seem to feel the loss. Political participation, as **Fatmah Farag** finds out, continues to suffer the constraints of gender and patronage


Patronage-based ties often excite stronger electoral passions than political differences

Reasserting women's right to vote

In 1956 feminist activists led by Doria Shafiq won the right to vote for Egyptian women — yet 41 years on, the majority of women are still either unaware of their right or do not use it.

The Centre for Women's Rights, based in Dar El-Salam in Old Cairo, is determined to change this. Since it was set up in November 1996 its volunteers have worked hard to increase the political awareness of women in their district. Telling women about their voting rights is top of the list.

A field study, carried out by the Centre in cooperation with the Cairo-based non-governmental organisation, the Group for Developing Democracy, surveyed 1,250 familie in working class areas in and around Cairo — in Dar El-Salam, Tora, El-Warraq and El-Saf — and found that most women in these districts are unaware of voting rights.

"Women feel that voting is not something that concerns them and that if their husbands vote then that is enough. They also feel that it is a political act and the word 'politics' has become a source of fear for most," said Nehad Abul-Qomsan, head of the Women's Rights Centre.

Apathy regarding elections in Egypt is not confined to women. In Dar El-Salam, for example, out of a population of 1,200,000 only 8,000 people are registered voters and only 800 of those are women.

But voting is more problematic for women than men, as the working group at the Centre discovered.

"When we started approaching women and telling them that they should get a voting card we found out that they did not have personal ID which is a prerequisite," said Fatma Sayed Ismail, a social worker and volunteer at the Centre.

"Then, when we started procedures to help the women get ID cards we discovered that they didn't have birth certificates which means that to get themselves registered they would have to go through a lengthy process which most are unwilling to undertake."

A further complication is that under Egyptian law women must request registration through their local police stations and are not automatically registered at the age of 18 like their male counterparts. Most women are also afraid to enter police stations. "There is a general feeling that they will be abused if they go to the police station and they are really afraid of the idea," explained Heba Ahmed, a law student and volunteer at the Centre. "Also their husbands and families will not let them go... There is a belief that only people who have done something bad go to police stations and not decent people."

One young woman from Warraq El-Arab was dragged out of the station as she tried to register, said Ismail.

"I had convinced a colleague to go to the police station to get her card but someone saw her go in and told her father who immediately ran there, pulled her out and gave her a beating saying 'how dare you go into a police station'," she said.

The group has only succeeded in registering 18 women in Dar El-Salam after four months work. Limited resources are another obstacle it faces. The Centre can only use volunteers, of whom it has just eight, for the political awareness programme. People in the community are often hesitant to offer support and in some cases even go out of their way to create problems, said Abul-Qomsan.

"In El-Saf two of our volunteers were forced to stop working with us after their families received complaints from the families of candidates. The problem was that the girls were not only encouraging women to go and vote but were also telling them to vote on the basis of a programme which they could hold candidates accountable to later on... This made the candidates' families angry," she said.

Simply finding a place to meet women is also difficult. The group now goes to places where women naturally congregate — literacy classes and mosques. However, at several places those in charge were unwilling to cooperate. "Some people are afraid that we are talking about politics and some don't believe in what we are doing," said Ismail. "We were supposed to have a meeting today after a literacy class but the manager sent the women home before we could meet them, even though we had the permission of the director — he just doesn't believe in women's rights," she added.

These are some of the specific problems to which Centre activists add high rates of female illiteracy to. For example, female illiteracy stands at 83 per cent in Dar El-Salam. More importantly, however, is the general belief among people that even if they go to vote the final results will neither represent their will nor serve to improve their lot.

Abul-Qomsan admits that this is a big problem. "In El-Saf people actively participated in the parliamentary elections and stood behind the candidate they wanted. The result was announced to be in favour of their candidate but it was changed a few hours later," she claimed.

However, Abul-Qomsan believes that this lack of trust in the system reflects the weakness of the people themselves. "People could have gone on strike or taken some other form of collective action and insisted on their candidate but they just gave in and this is what we are trying to tell them now — it can be up to us if we persevere. Even if women go and cast a blank vote it will be an improvement."

The Centre's work has not been without reward; some women have been receptive to their ideas. Women participating in a debate which the Centre recently arranged with candidates running for the forthcoming local council poll bombarded the nominees with questions, complaints and requests.

Afaf, a middle-aged housewife, said with a knowing smile, "I have gone to vote twice before and every time the person I vote for wins he forgets all about us. I want a candidate who will remember the problems of the poor after he is elected so I will try again and vote in these local council elections but I don't know if it will be any different this time. What can we do?"

Patronage power

Behind a narrow strip of land on Cairo's Imbaba corniche called Warraq El-Hadar, where a metre of land is worth LE5,000, is a sprawling maze of low-rise, low-cost buildings. The side-streets are narrow and unpaved and the scenery bears more than a passing resemblance to rural areas. Welcome to Warraq El-Arab, a thriving working-class neighbourhood with a population of nearly one million people.

There is a total of 44 seats up for the taking in next week's local elections here, contested by 56 candidates, many of whom come from well-known local families.

Five such families have fielded 22 candidates, explains *Hag* Ahmed, the father of one of the candidates. "There are 56 candidates in the race. Twenty-two come from good families and the rest from modest background. Some of the poorer candidates are running because they had helped out one of the two local members of parliament and expect to receive some help in return. But this is all they have," said *Hag* Ahmed, pointing out that his family, the Salmaniya, is one of the most powerful in the locality. Five family members are running in the elections.

Other well-heeled families in the neighbourhood include the Hamayda (five candidates), the Amarna (six candidates), the Shewaytha (three candidates) and the Hadra (three candidates).

During the 1995 parliamentary elections, rivalry between the Salmaniyas and the Hamaydas escalated into election day violence, in which, according to one eyewitness, "the streets ran with blood." The Hamayda candidate won and the locals speculate about a possible replay of the violent scenario next week.

The rivalry, if not the bloodshed, makes sense. Leading families find it both prestigious and profitable to be represented in the local councils. Oddly enough, the less prosperous members of the community find little fault with this state of affairs.

"I will vote for *Hag* Ahmed's son," said Samra, a young mother who rocked her baby on her knees as she spoke. She has just completed a literacy class at the community service centre founded and funded by *Hag* Ahmed. "The *Hag* always stands by us and does good things and that is why I will vote for his son," Samra said.

Haj Ahmed believes that people will vote for those who can offer "substantial contributions" to the neighbourhood's welfare. His four-storey, bright-green community centre offers literacy classes, nursery services and once-a-week free health care.

But what exactly do the people of Warraq El-Arab want from their elected officials? A hospital, for one thing.

"We only have a small clinic and it doesn't cover all our needs. The nearest free-of-charge hospital is too far away and whenever there is an emergency we have to go to a private clinic and pay five or six pounds, a sum which most of us cannot afford," said Samra.

The locals also need more schools. Classroom capacity in the neighbourhood is so limited that schools have to work three shifts per day to accommodate the children. And, to build schools you need local initiative. More often than not, this initiative comes from prominent families.

For example, when powerful locals cooperated in building a school, they invited the governor to witness the work's progress. Pleased with what he saw, the governor ordered LE50,000 of governorate funds allocated to purchase the school's furniture.

So in an area like El-Warraq, it is not simply the government party that can get things done. Action by affluent families can be just as crucial in keeping the wheels of local communities turning.

Shop owner Mohamed Eissa put it in a nutshell: "Of course, I will vote for someone from a big family. This is how I trust things to get done."

Day of the turtles

Environmental experts turn to sea turtles for an answer to an irritating problem for swimmers. **Sherine Nasr** reports

The Suez Canal University has sponsored a project to reinvigorate the sea turtle population throughout Egyptian coastal waters. The unlikely stimulus for this ambitious undertaking is the common jellyfish, in uncommon numbers.

"Sea turtles are the main predators to jellyfish which are appearing in increasing numbers along Egyptian beaches," said Samir Ghoneim, dean of the Faculty of Fish Resources and head of the Fish Research Centre at Suez Canal University.

Almost invisible in the water, jellyfish can be a nuisance to swimmers since, in self-defence, they secrete a substance which irritates human skin. "Some beach enthusiasts may become discouraged at the thought of sharing familiar waters with these unfamiliar guests," said Ghoneim, "As a result fewer people want to spend their holidays there."

The problem dates back to 1986 when the spread of jellyfish was first noticed along the Mediterranean beaches of Marsa Matruh, Alexandria, El-Arish and Rafah. Along the eastern coastline, the canal cities of Port Said, Ismailia and Suez are also victims of jellyfish overpopulation.

Among the solutions suggested were manual collection and chemical population control. "Their numbers are too great to be collected manually and to use chemicals would ultimately destroy other forms of sea life," argued Ghoneim.

With a greater understanding of the jellyfish and its natural habitat came a more promising option. According to Waheed Salama, an environmental expert, "Sea turtles feed mainly on jellyfish. When their ecological balance is disturbed due to unregulated hunting, the jellyfish population explodes." The basic idea of the new project is to increase the sea turtle population and this, in turn, means a reduction in the jellyfish population.

The list of animals eager to feast on vulnerable sea turtles includes wolves, dogs, birds, sharks and whales, all of which naturally deplete the turtle population from eggs to adulthood. Alongside this line-up are anxious fishermen hoping to sell their catch at the market. Samir Ghoneim explains, "Because of longstanding superstitions regarding the value of sea turtles as a cure for infertility in women, people catch and sell sea turtles in great numbers for a high price. Their meat and eggs are also eaten by coastal inhabitants."

An attempt to protect the nests of sea turtles has already started in El-Arish. A team from the university installed a number of cages over unhatched turtle eggs to shield them from natural predators. The cone-shaped cage is fixed to the ground and has openings that allow only hatchlings to pass. "The idea was copied from Cyprus where sea turtles are preserved. The cost is quite reasonable and this method provides good protection for the eggs as well as the hatchlings," said Ghoneim.

An average nest includes almost 150 eggs, of which almost half will hatch. The hatchlings go directly to the sea. "They have to be guided to the sea before dawn, otherwise, they will be easy prey for wild birds and animals," said Ghoneim. "If they hatch during daytime, the trained personnel make sure to keep them inside the cages until nightfall."

Once these hatchlings become mature eight or 10 years later, they have to lay their eggs in the very site where they were born. "It is, thus, vital to preserve the identity of these nests or the sea turtles will lose their way," added Ghoneim.

The university has sought the help of concerned organisations to aid in financing a widespread application of the cage-method on other beaches. "The initiative was welcomed by a number of international bodies advocating environmental preservation," said Ghoneim. Among these are the Marine Biological Association in Plymouth, Queen Mary College at the University of London and the British Council in Egypt.

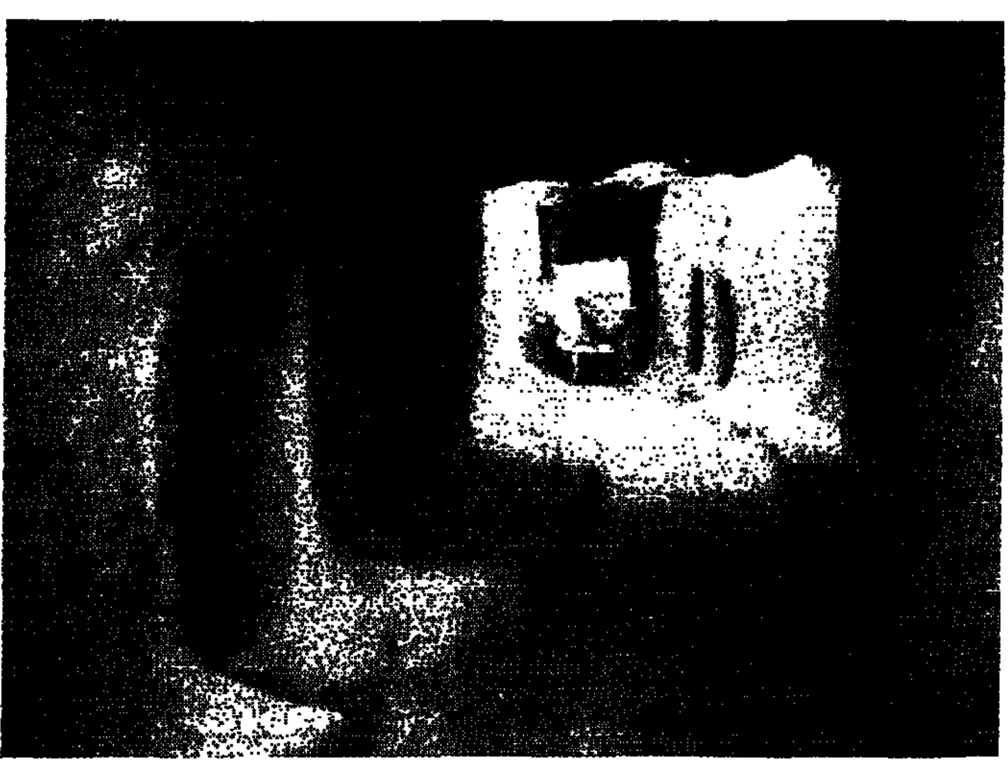
Although an increase in the number of hatched eggs is a good start, experts are also looking further along the life cycle of the sea turtle for solutions to their diminished numbers. "A female turtle becomes mature at the age of twelve. Hunting female turtles before they have a chance to lay any eggs destroys a huge potential for population growth," said Salama.

Since sea turtles migrate seasonally along the coastlines of several Mediterranean countries, any efforts to protect mature turtles has to be coordinated among their hosts. "A team from the university travelled to Turkey, Cyprus and Greece to discuss a collective plan for the protection of sea turtles," said Ghoneim. "The laws in these countries prohibit the hunting of sea turtles and the beaches where nests are known to exist have been declared protected areas."

The latest experiment carried out by the university team aims at examining controlled hatching in incubators as a method of increasing the number of hatchlings. "The young turtles will be tagged and then released to determine their migration route," said Ghoneim. A number of male and female stocks are also being raised under protective supervision to gauge their rate of growth as well as their acceptance of nests prepared by the university team. "As yet there is no prediction of their behaviour," Ghoneim said.

A long-term proposal includes the formation of a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the protection of sea turtles in the coastal governorates. "The members will be all those interested in the subject including biologists, environmentalists, students and fishermen," said Ghoneim, adding that enhancing public awareness will perhaps prove to be the most effective way to protect this creature.

More enjoyable sea-side holidays, thanks to the turtles *photo: Sherif Sonbol*





Nature-lovers by nature, the inhabitants of Dakhla oasis have created environmentally friendly streets and houses.

Nature lovers, rejoice

Eco-lodges are an increasingly popular trend in tourism. **Sherine Nasr** attended a workshop on the preservation of Egypt's natural areas

Travellers today are more concerned about the environment than ever before. Aware of this, Egypt is not only promoting, but protecting its assets; the preservation of marine and coastal zones, deserts, wetlands and wildlife is being given priority alongside Egypt's famous cultural heritage. Concrete steps are being taken toward developing environmentally-sensitive areas without destroying natural habitats.

Supported by USAID's Environmentally Sustainable Tourism Programme, one of the first steps taken to realise this goal was to build eco-lodges rather than luxurious hotels and resorts.

"An eco-lodge is a nature-dependent, tourist lodge which is environmentally-friendly and blends with the existing landscape," said Hector Ceballos, an eco-lodge architect.

Ceballos believes that the most important thing about an eco-lodge is not the lodge itself but the surrounding natural and cultural attractions, "including the local inhabitants."

The idea is not to replace hotels, but to expand the definition to include environmentally-friendly shelters. "This varies from sleeping in the open air to setting up a tent or hut," said Ammar El-Khamash, an architect who helped build a number of eco-lodges in Jordan. "It is giving precedence to ecology, and less importance to the facility itself."

The use of local building materials promotes a harmonious image with the surrounding landscape.

Although the term eco-lodge has, until recently, been vague, the concept of building environmentally-friendly tourist shelters has captured the interest of a number of Egyptian investors who have already started projects aimed at satisfying the needs of eco-tourists. The first of these, Basata, lies 40km south of Taba on the western coast of the Aqaba Gulf. "*Basata* means simplicity, and that was what I was aiming for when I planned my project. I wanted to create a village that would do very little damage to the area's ecology," said Sherif El-Ghamrawi, Basata's owner.

El-Ghamrawi, who started his business 12 years ago, did not know then that he was building a typical eco-lodge. "I didn't even know what the word meant," he remarked.

Basata consists of several small huts, one large communal living room, a spacious kitchen where tourists can cook their own meals and two clean toilets. "The site developed slowly and I was always more concerned with the number of huts the area could handle, as opposed to how many the tourists might need," explained El-Ghamrawi.

As his aim was to integrate development with nature, he decided to use bamboo as building material. "No chemicals and no cement," he stressed. "The furniture and decorations are all hand made." Even the greenery selected to enhance the surrounding landscape was carefully chosen for its environmental suitability.

In Basata tourists can enjoy a oneness with nature — fishing, swimming, playing the guitar, observing the stars or going on safari tours in small groups guided by local Bedouin. There are no television sets, VCRs, discotheques or alcohol available. The most daring decision taken by El-Ghamrawi was to forbid diving, snorkelling and all other types of potentially-destructive water sports. "By running an eco-lodge, I am guaranteed to attract the right type of guest," he contended.

Interestingly, although Basata has never been formally promoted, the eco-lodge is fully booked until 1998. "I rely on word-of-mouth promotion. Those who liked the site tell their friends about it. In fact, most tourists come for a two-week stay and 70 per cent of them come back."

El-Ghamrawi's chief goal is to keep the area intact, "so that coming generations will be able to enjoy a landscape that has existed for thousands of years."

Another successful eco-lodge is based in Qusseir where nature-loving tourists can go as far as Ras Banas (390km south of Qusseir) to enjoy diving. The owner, Hosam Helmi, was another person who had never heard of the word eco-lodge before he began his project. "I wanted to have very simple facilities, so I set up a number of tents 400m from the shoreline." He later built more permanent facilities using sandstone quarried nearby. "I made use of dome and vault architecture, because such a structure renders the atmosphere cool without air-conditioning," he explained.

Throughout the 10 years his lodge has been operating, Helmi has regularly polled tourists to determine what they really want. "It is amazing that 90 per cent of the guests recommended that I keep the eco-lodge as it is and never consider any further developments," he remarked.

Samah Ghoneim, whose eco-lodge will be primarily a diving centre 80km south of Qusseir, is using a new type of building material which, according to her, has been successfully utilised in Canada, Finland and Mexico. "The bale of dried straw will probably be my choice," Ghoneim said. "I am trying to develop a new concept in designing my project so that tourists can see, feel and smell the Earth."

Egyptians in many areas throughout the country are constructing Eco-lodges without being aware of it. Dakhla Oasis, with its winding streets and dome-like roofs, and people's homes in Abul-Rish, a small village near Aswan, are examples. "It was not these people's intention to impress tourists, yet the result is quite remarkable," said Rami El-Dahhan who designed a number of eco-lodges along the Red Sea coast.

Expanding eco-tourism allows Egypt to compete for a wider variety of tourists. "It is a difficult task, and apart from building eco-lodges other attractions will need to be developed," said Ceballos. These include local inhabitants and their traditional handicrafts.

Eco-tourism should complement rather than exploit the local area, as it does in Qusseir, where almost 60 per cent of the hotel workers are recruited from the surrounding communities. "Local residents make excellent safari and field guides and, consequently, become valuable contributors to the activities of eco-tourists," Ceballos contended.

He explained that eco-tourism sites on the Internet have become an essential step toward creating an awareness about Egypt's natural resources. "Almost 80 per cent of Americans are arranging tours on their computers now, and not through tour operators."

The potential for eco-tourism on the Red Sea is great. Keeping it operative will be the real long-term challenge.



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Spotlight on eco-tourism

AN ECO-LODGE is not only comfortable for guests, but also more economical for its owner. The cost of accommodation can be up to a fifth of the price of a regular hotel. The latter provides luxury, relaxation and facility-based activities, whereas an eco-lodge focuses on education and nature-based activities such as hiking, snorkelling, diving and horse riding.

According to the latest World Travel Organisation reports, the number of tourists interested in taking trips to undisturbed, natural areas has reached 60 million.

A large segment of these are bird-watchers. According to the most recent statistics, there are approximately 65 million bird-watchers in the US alone. Twenty-four million of them make at least one bird-watching trip abroad annually. Out of the recorded 2,000 species of birds in the world, some 360 are found in Egypt. Our national protectorates and the wetlands created around various lakes provide ideal conditions for observing these winged beauties.

All about *Aida*

The promotion of the Opera *Aida*, to be staged in front of Hatshepsut's temple in Luxor next October, was among the highlights of Egypt's participation in the ITB. **Rehab Saad** reviews the market's results

Tourist fairs enable nations to promote their country's products, particularly unique destinations and non-traditional events. This year, at the International Tourism Exchange (ITB) held in Berlin, Egypt displayed its diverse wares and focused on some special attractions.

One of these was musical festivals scheduled for the coming year, and no single event is bigger or of greater international interest than the staging of the opera *Aida* in Luxor in October. "We promoted the event at all our press conferences and meetings. We also invited the head of the Opera House to give details of the performance and marketing plans," said Mamdouh El-Beltagui, the minister of tourism.

The minister also invited a German troupe, who are known for Pharaonic-style dancing, to perform in Luxor before the inauguration of the opera.

Additionally, Egypt succeeded in attracting German musicians to give a concert at Giza next June simultaneously with a 1,000-member choir who will be singing there.

Besides the promotion of musical events, officials also concentrated on marketing new trends, such as desert safaris and camel caravans, sailing on Lake Nasser, medical-rehabilitation tourism, diving and conference tourism.

Promoting specific areas was also highlighted during the exhibition. South Sinai displayed its new slogan 'Sinai '97: come and see for yourself,' and the *International Herald Tribune* published a four-page travel supplement about tourist trends in Sinai and the peninsula's investment opportunities.

The minister of tourism met with major German tour operators, hearing their complaints with regard to Egypt. They expressed concern that the current tourism boom might cause some problems which, they fear, could affect Egypt's reputation. One of these was overcrowded airports at Luxor, Hurghada and in Cairo's domestic arrival and departure halls. "Tourists are sometimes required to wait for long periods in confined areas which lack proper facilities, including toilets," lamented one of the German tour operators. Another stressed that "Quality should be provided 100 per cent of the time, because tourism lives on quality." Another German travel agent suggested that Egyptian hotels should not impose obligatory meals or entertainment on their clients.

El-Beltagui responded by saying that these grievances will be seriously considered and that the ministry will exercise its supervisory role to ensure that everything runs smoothly in Egypt's hotels.

"As for airports, there are always temporary solutions until such time as all the airports can be upgraded, such as establishing fully-equipped temporary halls which can provide all necessary services," said El-Beltagui, who assured travel agents that this was being attended to promptly and certainly would be taken care of in time for the grand opening of *Aida* in October.

Site Tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Qusseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions. Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has it All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.vivc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

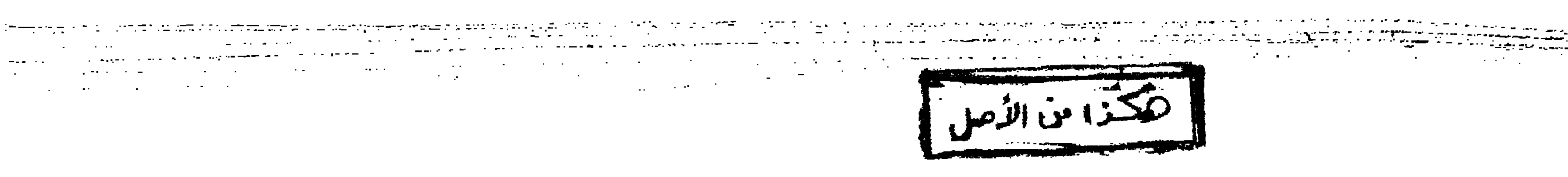
http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.

http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5u/city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5u is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Compiled by ***Rehab Saad***





Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak attending the opening ceremony

Right to score

The first Pan-Arab Football Tournament was held this week, bringing together the dreams and desires of dozens of special players. **Abeer Anwar** reports

For the 50 players who took to the field of a newly-constructed Olympic stadium last week, it was a dream come true — a large-scale football competition in which they were not remanded to the sidelines. The players, who came from Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Egypt, however, were not *just your average football enthusiast, but* mentally handicapped children who were competing in the first Pan-Arab Football Tournament for the Mentally-Handicapped.

The opening ceremony of the tournament, which drew to a close last Monday, was held in the new stadium located on the campus of the Misr Language School, while the main matches were held in the Ahli Club and Cairo Stadium. The 5,000 seat, LE3 million stadium was opened by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, and is administered by the Special Olympics of *Egypt (SOE) society, an organisation devoted* to promoting the welfare and development of mentally handicapped children and youths through sports. The SOE is a branch of the Special Olympics International (SOI), and was formed in 1995.

"The aim of this society is to give these children the right to live, practice and win at sports," said Ismail Othman, head of the SOE.

Also attending the inauguration ceremonies was Mrs Eunice Kennedy Shriever, the president and founder of the SOI. For Shriever, *this tournament was perhaps as exciting as it* was for the participants. It was Shriever's efforts nearly 30 years ago which gave rise to the *idea* of a Special Olympics for mentally handicapped children. The first such competition was held in 1967, but the SOI, since then, has expanded to include 143 Special Olympics branches around the world, catering to the needs of roughly one million children.

"We chose Egypt as the first Arab and African country to host a Special Olympics stadium *after* following the *progress* Egyptian athletes have made in international events," said Shriever. "Their performance in the last Special Olympics was remarkable."



Egypt aced out

No Egyptians made it through to the finals of the *first of four international* satellite tennis competitions currently being held in Egypt, writes **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab**



Damien Vera, a French player, ranked 816, trying to find his place in the tournament at the Shooting Club *photo: Aref Saad El-Din*

The 1st International Satellite Tennis Circuit Tournament drew to a close last week in the Maadi Club and, in so doing, paved the way for another three weeks of high-level international tennis to be played in Egypt. *This competition*, however, was not without its moments, both in terms of play and weather.

Topping the list of major wins to take place in this, the first such satellite competition of the year and the 11th to be organised by the Egyptian Tennis Federation, was that of the *tournament's fifth-seed* and Hungary's world-ranked 384, Zoltan Nagi, who cruised through the singles finals, snatching the title from the Czech Republic's Jiri Vanek. In previous matches, Nagi swept by Egypt's Gehad El-Deeb, 6-4, 6-0, Norway's Helge Koll, 6-4, 6-4 and Britain's *Paul* Robinson, 6-4, 6-4, before going up against Vanek. Explaining his defeat to the Hungarian, Vanek said that it was a combination of bad weather and illness which prevented him from playing up to speed.

Neither Nagi nor Vanek, however, had much luck in the *doubles* events, with both men, along with their doubles partners, being eliminated in the quarter-finals. Nagi, with his German partner Jan Weinzerl, lost to the Egyptian pair of Adly El-Shafie and Amr Ghoneim, 3-6, 2-6. Ghoneim and El-Shafie were subsequently defeated in the semi-finals by the Czech team of Rene Hanak and Tomas Krupa. The Czechs went on to *clinch the doubles title after blowing* past Bulgaria's Alex Slvec and Dimitri Tomashevich of Uzbekistan. Hanak and Krupa were second seeded in the tournament and world-ranked 808, while Slvec and Tomashevich were seeded fourth and ranked 888 in the world.

Tournament play in this satellite competition began two days following the conclusion of the preliminaries, where players were seeded according to their professional ranking. As the host country, Egypt was allowed five wild cards in the qualification rounds and three in the main draw. These perks, however, did not seem to help the Egyptian players much, given that they were *eliminated in the first rounds.*

The outcome of this competition is vital for the players in these International Tennis Federation (ITF) tournaments to earn ATP points which, in turn, help boost their professional ranking and guarantee adequate international experience.

To this end, the ETF had launched the first such satellite tournament in 1992. The Egyptian circuit competitions, since then, have quickly increased in frequency and popularity, with this one drawing in 60 international players and 13 Egyptians, all of whom vied for the $25,000 pot.

According to Hisham Nasser, the tournament's director, the next three tours of the satellite circuit in Egypt, which will be held in Dokki's Shooting Club, Zamalek's Gezira Club and El-Mansoura's Gezirat Al-Ward, will be even more intense.

Child's play

THE AHLI Club's indoor hall will play host to the first Indoor Football Tournament for Schools. The four-day competition, which starts today, brings together 16 teams representing different Cairo preparatory stage schools.

Zakaria Nassef, head of the tournament organising committee, said that the idea of organising this competition came up after the Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri's call to *encourage and support sports in schools. The tournament is* held under the supervision of the Egyptian Football Association (EFA).

EFA referees will participate in running the event, while the association's coaches will be on-hand to recruit a select number of talented children to join the ranks of their various clubs, and to form a future junior national football team.

The tournament, added Nassef, is but the first of a series of similar competitions.

Hingis can

IN *JUST* 44 sweet minutes 16-year-old Martina Hingis of Switzerland crushed Monica Seles 6-2, 6-1 in the Lipton Championships final. Hingis now assumes the title of the youngest world number one in tennis history.

In the same tournament, a usually-cool and collected Thomas Muster showed a rare display of emotion after winning the men's title 7-6, 6-3, 6-1 over Spain's Sergio Bruguera.

More women handballers

ON THE occasion of its last meeting held in Cancun, Mexico, the International Olympic Committee decided to increase the number of women's handball teams participating in the Olympic Games Handball competition to 10.

The IOC decision came in response to a request submitted by the International Handball Federation (IHF) to increase the number of teams participating from eight to 12.

Women's *handball was first included* in the *Olympic* programme in 1976, where six teams competed. The number of teams has increased by two every 12 years, since that base year. IHF officials, while happy with the decision that will go into effect in the 2000 Olympics, expressed hope that they *would not have to wait another 12 years for a similar increase.*

Eubank, a Muslim

CHRIS Eubank, 30, the former British world boxing middleweight and super-middleweight champion, converted to *Islam and changed his name to Hamdan, after a fourth round* win over Colombia's Camilio Alacon in Dubai. Eubank, who won the bout by technical knock-out, is said to have been reading up on Islam for the last two years.

Known for his showmanship, the British boxer made a comeback bid for the title in Egypt last year, after spending a year in retirement prompted by a second loss to Irishman Steve Collins in March 1995. By converting to Islam, Eubank joins the list of boxing *greats like Cassius Clay (Mohamed Ali)* and Mike Tyson, who converted during their career.

Eubank is also expected to begin training the United Arab Emirate's national boxing team.

Banned for life

SWITZERLAND'S Kurt Rothlisberger was banned from refereeing for life by UEFA after being found guilty of attempting to fix a European champions league match.

A UEFA spokesman said that Rothlisberger contacted *Grasshopper officials shortly before the match, saying he was* a friend of the Belarus referee in charge of the match and that if they wanted, he could fix the result.

Rothlisberger is reported to have demanded over $600,000.

Drug scandal

ASIAN football was rocked by a major drug scandal last week when the Asian Football Association (AFA) confirmed for the first time that four players failed tests at last December's Asian Cup.

The players were not being identified, but the failures were after the semifinals and the final of Asia's top international event, in which Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Italy reached the semifinals, and Saudi Arabia beat UAE in the final.

The only Asian player to previously fail a drug test at an Asian tournament was Thailand's Srisak Kidalee at the 1994 Asian Games in Hiroshima, Japan. He was banned for one year *and the Football Association of Thailand was fined 3,000* dollars.

The AFA will redouble its efforts to preach the message that drugs and football do not mix. Up till now the cases had been referred to FIFA to decide what action to take.

Reigns, rains

THE DUBAI World Cup, the world's richest horse race, which was postponed last week due to torrential rains, is scheduled to be run today. The deluge last Saturday left the Nadi Al-Sheba *dirt race track waterlogged* and threatened to cancel the $4 million race. But Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid, Dubai's crown prince and the main force behind the event, met with organisers and trainers and salvaged the event.

The originally-13 horse race, however, will be run minus European champion Helissio. Elie Lellouche, Helissio's trainer, withdrew the horse from competition after Saturday's storm. Rain-storms earlier in the week twice closed the track to training, and more rain will almost certainly result in its complete cancellation.

Rowing ahead

CAMBRIDGE won the 143rd University Boat Race when they *beat Oxford by just six seconds in a thrilling 4.25 mile race on* the Thames.

Cambridge, who had to make three late position changes, put their problems behind them and overcame the disadvantage of having to row on the outside of the long Surrey bend, to secure their hard-fought triumph in 17 minutes 38 seconds. The race was so close that a clash of oars looked likely as the two crews came within inches of each other, despite repeated warnings *from the race umpire.*



Barada takes fourth

EGYPTIAN former world junior champion Ahmed Barada came in behind winner Simon Parke, Brett Martin, and Jansher Khan to take fourth place in the Super Series squash championships in London, reports **Eman Abdel-Moeti.**

The world's eight best squash players fought for the championship title, attracted by a total of $40,000 in prize money. In pool one, Ahmed Barada, world-ranked seven, beat Peter Nicol, worldranked three, *3-1. He was then defeated 3-1* by world champion Jansher Khan after a long struggle, but ended in second place in his pool after Jansher following his 3-0 defeat of Zubeir Khan. He then faced Simon Parke, ranked number four in the world, in the semifinal. He lost this hard-fought match 2-3 (7-9, 2-9, 9-5, 9-5, 2-9).

This is the first time an Egyptian has participated in the Super Series, and for Barada, it marked the achievement of one of his *dreams — to climb to fourth position in the world rankings. For* the world's top player, Jansher Khan, victory in this tournament has helped him regain confidence after his defeat last year by England's Del Harris.

Meanwhile, the British Squash Open began last Sunday, with Egypt fielding full teams in both the men's and women's competitions.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Victor del Burgo:

From palaces to cinemas, mosques to factories: you won't see his name on a bronze plaque. But look closely and there, on the facade, is the print of a hand. The hand is his, the rest is silence



Downtown's castles

Doris Behrens-Abouseif of the University of Munich "discovered" Victor del Burgo, architect extraordinaire, while in Cairo, preparing her paper for the conference on a Century of Scientific Architecture in Egypt, 1850-1950, held recently at the Italian Cultural Centre. What she had to say was enough to arouse curiosity. How had we not heard about him? "Try," said Abouseif in her off-hand, busy manner. "He has very interesting stories to tell, but he won't tell them. He opens up, and then suddenly refuses to talk. He is eccentric to the point of keeping no records or photographs of his buildings. He may or may not want to talk about them. He says the past bores him."

All this was challenging enough, bearing in mind that del Burgo, an Italian Jew who was born and has spent his entire life in Egypt, still works full-time at the age of 87 and that he is, as he later proudly confirmed, the sole remaining representative of the "classic" Egyptian architects. His office is on the ninth floor of a modern building in Garden City. "If the elevator doesn't work, don't bother, we will make another appointment," said the voice on the phone, which definitely did not betray old age. He, however, climbed the stairs on one occasion, because we had arranged to meet. "I have never missed an appointment," he explained simply. His mind is sharp, and so is his wit. His frail appearance poses no obstacle to an exquisite gallanterie. He fusses over women, admitting readily that a large part of his life has been devoted to their appreciation. Soon, under his piercing gaze, they are made to feel like Marilyn Monroes, mincing coyly toward the proffered chair in his sparsely decorated office.

Del Burgo does not like questions. He asks very few and agrees to answer even fewer, unless, by chance, a subject is hit upon that he feels like addressing. He only waxes lyrical where his children and grandchildren are concerned, explaining in great detail what they are doing now and how gifted and successful they all are. Suddenly, in a non sequitur, he blurts: "Listen, la Burri (Carla Burri, director of the Italian Cultural Centre), she wanted me to send her my curriculum vitae. She said that the Italian government wanted to decorate me. What for? Well anyway, I sent her what she wanted. She called back, saying that it had to be typed in Italian. Do you know someone who types Italian here? I don't. Well, my daughter called from Italy and I told her about the decoration. 'I'll do it for you,' she said. So there I am, sending her a fax and she sends it back, properly typed in Italian. Well, now la Burri says that it will take a year to get the decoration. 'Fine,' I told her, 'you can hang it on my tomb.' How can I tell if I'll live another year?" With a swipe of the hand, as if shooing a fly, he dismisses the whole subject. "The buildings," he muses, "I built them, so what, others built before, others will build after, who cares?..."

He was educated at the Collège des Frères at El-Khoronfish. Everyone in his family went to Catholic schools. Suddenly, his face lights up mischievously. "I married the daughter of the director of the Barclays Bank," he chuckles. "He was a practicing Jew. He had a synagogue built in the garden of his Zamalek villa, because on the Sabbath it is said that neither you, nor your slave, nor your donkey must work. The synagogue being in Adli Street, he would have had to walk there and, since the idea did not appeal to him, he built a place of worship in his own garden. When I asked for the hand of his daughter, he wanted to know where I wanted to get married. 'I don't know,' I answered him. 'Maybe I will take her to our room in front of ten witnesses. Isn't that the way they used to do it?' The future father-in-law was not amused. Eventually, as a concession, del Burgo offered to get married at the Italian Consulate. The father of the bride-to-be wanted a religious ceremony. "But that," said del Burgo, "I was not going to do. I had never set foot in a synagogue and I was not going to do so now, not even in his garden." Finally a compromise was reached. The rabbi would unite the couple on the verandah, outside the synagogue. Ten years and two daughters later, they separated. "I am a Bohemian," says del Burgo briefly. "One day I have money and I proceed to blow it, the next, I can't afford to buy a packet of cigarettes. I like it that way. She could not take it; but we have remained best friends." His wife lives in England, as does one of his daughters. The other lives in Rome. "Whenever I visit one of the girls, my wife comes to stay with us and we have a good time." But he always comes back to Egypt, "because this is where I live and work."

Of his career, he wants to say little. His only claim to fame, he insists, is that whatever he has built will withstand the test of time (including earthquakes). His eyes shine and the impish smile reappears: "I challenge you to find a crack in any one of my buildings," he says forcefully. Paradoxically, he has always gone to great lengths to disguise his architectural imprint. "They forced me to place a plaque with my name on the buildings after they were finished. So I adopted a cryptic sign. You can see it on one of the faces of the Egyptian piastres," he says, quickly sketching it. "It is called the *torra*, it is the imprint of Sultan Selim's hand on the document ending the war with Hungary." He thinks a while, then decides that all this architectural talk is futile. "Ask Doris, I told her about the buildings." Abouseif had walked about Cairo with him and he had given her some information that he obviously has no desire to repeat now.

During her walks through Cairo in del Burgo's company, Abouseif was struck by the informal character of his career, "reminiscent of that of medieval builders. Apparently, like him, most of the other Italian architects who worked in Egypt had not been trained academically. Notwithstanding his lack of formal training, the bulk of del Burgo's work involved factories and movie theatres and the most important part of his career was in civil engineering. At the age of 75, he closed his own office. He did not want the hassle. Today he is employed as a civil engineer in a British-Egyptian joint venture piling company. He, however, regards architecture not as a technical skill but as an art requiring a special talent."

In many ways, del Burgo is both an archetype and an aberration. He epitomises old world courtesy; his staunch refusal to say the right things, just to please, in no way detracts from his ability to charm. There is much about him of the pre-revolution European Cairene, but he, unlike the majority of his compatriots, stayed on. One feels he could live nowhere else, but there is no maudlin sentimentality about the staying.

He continued to work uninterruptedly, notes Abouseif, "at a time when Europeans were no longer welcome in professional fields. He taught architecture at [the] Leonardo da Vinci [Institute], for which he obtained university status, recognised by both Egypt and Italy. This is one period he talks about with enthusiasm, when he had a chance to pass on his knowledge and formed a number of good architects." Most of his family emigrated, but to his surprise, although he was Jewish and, therefore, technically *persona non grata*, he continued to be solicited for new building projects despite the Arab-Israeli wars. He was even asked to build the Gaza Mosque by Al-Azhar University. He went twice to Gaza, then under Egyptian military rule, to discuss the details, but the wars with Israel put a stop to the project. His work includes a large number of factories and a dozen movie theatres as well as villas and apartment buildings. Among the 19 factories he designed was one for Sepahi Textiles at Mustorod. He also built the Gianaclis Cigarettes Factory and Cinema Diana in 1930, the most modern cinema in Cairo at the time, with 400 seats. He began his career in the '20s, writes Abouseif, as apprentice with the Allegemeine Osterreichische Baugesellschaft, an Austrian contracting company which left Egypt a few years later. "He was thoroughly trained there for four years in architecture and engineering. He describes his years of apprenticeship as an extraordinarily exciting experience, a sort of private crash course he received from his highly qualified superiors. After work, he was invited to his boss's house for a three-hour lesson. Del Burgo speaks very enthusiastically of this training, asserting that today, as a civil engineer in a British-Egyptian company, he still applies the German system of piling calculations, which he considers superior to the British system commonly applied in Egypt. In 1927, he successfully took a professional examination at the Ministry of Public Works and was then hired by the ministry to work on the building of the Mixed Courts. This building, which had been constructed by the government according to French specifications, had began to show serious structural deficiencies. Del Burgo joined a team of architects and engineers investigating the causes of these deficiencies. This experience allowed him to qualify as one of the best piling experts.

Del Burgo's most famous work, however, is perhaps "the pink mosque" — *Gami'* El-Ghazl at Mustorod — "an interesting example of unconventional religious architecture," as Abouseif writes, "in contrast with the Neo-Islamic style adopted by other Italian architects in building mosques. It is pentagonal, supported by five parabolic piers which meet at the top, forming a ceiling ring which is surmounted by a lantern. The five sides symbolise the five pillars of Islam and the ring where the arches meet is open to the sky. The mosque is pink to indicate the worldly aspect of Islam. The stucco work on the windows is in the shape of stylised cotton blossoms, a reference to the textile factory to which the mosque is attached. The interior is parabolic and so is the profile of the 30-metre minaret." The mosque, in many ways, is reminiscent of del Burgo himself: a surprising structure, quite simple at first sight, yet unprecedentedly, unrepentantly original. But that, too, is just water under the bridge. The architect is quite stubborn in his refusal to dwell on the past, and this, along with the somewhat haphazard but ultimately brilliant education he received, is characteristic of a man who has no time for the outward manifestations of success.

One of the few buildings del Burgo does not mind talking about, however, is a villa in Heliopolis, commissioned by Ahmed Naguib Pasha El-Gawahergi. "I had been building a small palace for Prince Faisal on the road to the airport. The land was at a crossroads and I built the facade at an angle, in such a way that it was seen from afar, coming down the main avenue." This was very unconventional at a time when the trend was to build the facades parallel to the street. "Ahmed Naguib, seeing the palace, inquired about the architect. One of the guards finally told him my name, which I had signed, as always, only with the *torra*. The same evening we started negotiations. I have never been eager to take a commission, you know. Only when I like the person do I accept. When I like my client, I do not mind working for free and I have done it several times. If I don't, I just flatly refuse. I am a free man. I can't be bribed, I can't be bought or cajoled into doing something I don't believe in. I want neither money nor honours. My only pride is my *sharaf*, and the deep conviction that I do my work well." At the moment, he is working with his friend and fellow architect Adel Qattan, restoring a wing of the Ras El-Tin Palace, which used to be known as the Princesses' Wing. It had been used as a military hospital and needs extensive work to be turned into a guest house for foreign delegations. The smile reappears: "You know why they employ me? Because I am the only architect who still understands classic architecture. The subject is taught in art history classes these days. All the young architects are taught nowadays is how to build little boxes. They call them modules! It sounds more serious."

Profile by **Fayza Hassan**

